CONCEALMENT AND REVELATION: A STUDY OF SECRECY AND INITIATION AMONG THE NUṢAYRĪ-ʿALAWĪS OF SYRIA

Bella Tendler

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Abstract

The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, the syncretistic Shiite sect currently prominent in Syria, are some of the only survivors of the heterodox cults of Early Islam. For theological and precautionary reasons they are forbidden from sharing their beliefs with outsiders. As a result, scholarly knowledge of their religion has been limited. Using a large collection of newly published treatises and unstudied manuscripts from the 10th-20th centuries, this dissertation explores the reasons for their secretiveness and the multi-staged process by which they initiate their youth.

The dissertation opens with the question of why, considering their strict insistence on secrecy, do the Nuṣayrīs revere several of the notorious Islamic heretics who publically preached the divinity of the Imams. Following the stories told by al-Khaṣībī, the 4th/10th century founder of the sect, about ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ, the arch-heretic of Islam, this dissertation uncovers the pattern of concealment and revelation that underlies the Nuṣayrī trinity, and which, by extension, informs their ideas of education, dissimulation, and initiation. The pervasiveness of this pattern demonstrates the significance of concealment and revelation for the self-definition of the Nuṣayrī religion, which, at its core, is an initiatory cult structured around the preservation and careful transmission of secret religious truths.

One of the principle ways the early Nuṣayrīs ensured the secrecy of their doctrines was by conceiving an extended sexual metaphor, according to which the transmission of religious knowledge is likened to sexual intercourse. Proceeding from this metaphor, the founders of the Nuṣayrī religion structured initiation as a spiritual marriage between a male master and disciple, which, like a physical marriage, could lead to gestation, birth, and breastfeeding stages. This theoretical construct encouraged Nuṣayrīs to hide the secret of their religion as one guards his

chastity, and to think of their coreligionists as family, united by bonds of marriage and consanguinity. As can be seen from the legal responsa of the 5th/11th century scholar al-Ṭabarānī, every aspect of this process was legislated according to precise parallels to Islamic family law. The detail with which this mirroring was sustained reveals the familiarity of the early Nuṣayrīs with the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence, dispelling widespread notions to the contrary.

In addition to the previously available material, this dissertation employs two manuscripts that were personally discovered by the author. The first is a lost 19th century manual for Nuṣayrī shaykhs. In 1860 it served as the basis for the first monograph on the Nuṣayrī religion, titled *The Asian Mystery*, by the Reverend Samuel Lyde. However this manuscript has been missing for the last 150 years. Its rediscovery and its influence on several related initiatory texts are described in detail. The second is a 19th century manual for Nuṣayrī novices that provides the first internal evidence to confirm reports of ritual libertinism among members of the sect. An appendix dealing with this subject, including a transcription and translation of the relevant sections of the manuscript, is attached to the dissertation.

The largest portion of this study is reserved for a description of the various initiatory rites. In explaining the stage directions, this dissertation also sets out many of the doctrines that, for lack of sources, have previously been misunderstood. Some of these include the appearance of God in light, the transubstantiation of God's body into wine, docetism, the primordial existence of believers as shadows, the transmigration of souls, the hierarchical structure of the cosmos, misogynism, and antinomianism. As such the dissertation should be of interest to scholars studying secrecy and initiation in other cultures, and to scholars of Islamic heterodoxy who now have access to primary source analyses of sectarian doctrines otherwise known only from secondhand heresiographical reports.

To David,

who believed in me from the beginning

and to Jetta,

who made me believe in myself

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Writing my dissertation on the subject of initiation has made me extremely aware of how my own journey these last few years has been a process of initiation, replete with as many challenges, ordeals, and moments of triumph as are experienced by the Nuṣayrī novice. As al-Ṣādiq is said to have told Abū al-Khaṭṭāb in al-Khaṣībī's *Fiqh risāla al-rāstbāshiyya*, "O Muhammad, warn the initiands into the knowledge of God that they enter as fifteen year old boys but exit as sixty year old men." (145) Indeed, I feel transformed by this process and am certain that I had no idea what was in store for me when I entered this doctoral program as a wide-eyed ingénue in 2004!

I am grateful to the Department of Near Eastern Studies and the Graduate School of Princeton University for giving me the opportunity to embark on this great adventure. I would also like to thank the National Security Education Program and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton for funding my two years off campus, and Princeton's Center for the Study of Religion for allowing me to develop my analyses as a fellow in their Religion and Culture workshop. A summer course in 2008 on the subject of orthodoxy and heresy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem inspired many aspects of this project, as did a 2010 conference in Paris and Nantes on the subject of the Nuṣayrīs and Druze sponsored by the Islamic Heterodoxies Project. The stimulating conversations, ideas, and contacts I made there have been invaluable to my studies.

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at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and Kenneth Dunn at National Library of Scotland. I would like to additionally thank Nicolas Barker at the Rare Books School for his advice on the Bibliotheca Lindesiana and my friends Ron Naiweld, Udi Engelsman, and Lev Weitz for their help obtaining manuscripts. Meir Bar-Asher, Samer Traboulsi, Luke Yarbrough and my colleagues at the Center for the Study of Religion and the Princeton Islamic Studies Colloquium read earlier versions of several chapters. Sean Anthony and Mushegh Asatryan offered advice on their respective fields of expertise. Most importantly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my *murshid* Michael Cook and *shaykha* Patricia Crone, my dear doctoral advisors, who helped me navigate through the growing pains of dissertation writing, who tirelessly commented on dozens of draft chapters, and whose forthright critique ensured that I never got away with less than my best work. Every good insight contained in this study is due to their guidance and whatever mistakes are found within are due to my own shortcomings. As the Nuṣayrī novice tells his sponsors upon entering the sect, "your necks are free of my sins." Although our journey together at Princeton officially ends here, I look forward to years of mentorship and friendship in the upcoming stages of my academic career.

Finally I would like to thank my parents, Yael and Yacov Tendler and Ruth and Abba Krieger, and my dear siblings and close friends who provided emotional support and hours of daycare assistance, making sure that my daughter Jetta never realized how busy her mother was. Thank you to Jetta for making the work worthwhile and to David, my beloved husband, who was there from the start and who walked, dragged, and carried me through every stage of this process. I couldn't have done it without you.

Notes on the Name of the Sect, Transliteration Style, Quranic Edition, and Dating Conventions

The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs are the followers of Nuṣayrism, a syncretistic religion that emerged from Iraqi Shiism in the fourth/tenth century, and whose adherents currently primarily reside in northern Syria and southeastern Turkey. Its name derives from the *nisba* of its third/ninth century ideological father, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, who, as a follower of the eleventh Shiite Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, preached the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the Imams. Considering Ibn Nuṣayr's heretical reputation among mainstream Muslims, the twentieth century adherents of this faith adopted the name ʿAlawite to highlight their affinity with other Shiites who merely revere ʿAlī as a man. Out of deference to their wishes, and taking into account the historical designation of this sect, modern scholarship invented the hyphenated term Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, which I use only in the title and introduction of this study. Following scholarly convention, I revert to the term Nuṣayrī when speaking of historical or religious matters and ʿAlawite when speaking of contemporary members of the sect.

In transliterating Arabic words I use the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, except in words that appear frequently in English such as Quran, Imam, Sunni, and Shiite. I write the *tāʾ marbūṭa* only when it is part of an *idafa* (genitive/possessive) construction. When quoting from the Quran I generally use Muḥammad Asad's translation, except when an original translation, more appropriate for the hermeneutical context is in order. I provide both Hijrī and Gregorian dates for the pre-modern period, but generally use Gregorian dates for more recent events.

Introduction

Over the past twenty years the academic world has experienced a marked revival in the study of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion, with several illuminating works published by Hienz Halm,[1] Matti Moosa, [2] Todd Olsson,[3] Meir Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, [4] Yaron Friedman, [5] and Gisela Procházka-Eisl and Stephen Procházka. [6] The Western interest in this obscure sect has had its counterpart in the Islamic world where numerous Arabic monographs on the *Nuṣayriyūn ʿAlawiyūn* have been penned.[7] The interest in this relatively small Islamic sect was most likely stirred by the rise to political power in 1966 of the Syrian ʿAlawite Hafiz al-Asad and with him, many members of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī community. Long a persecuted minority who avoided outside notice on principle, the newfound political prominence of the sect has caused many to

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[1] Heinz Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten'. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ġulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairiertums," *Islam*, no. 55 and 58 (1978 and 1981); Idem, *Die islamische Gnosis : die extreme Schia und die Alawiten* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1982); trans. as *Al-Ghunūṣiyya fī-l-Islām*, by Rāʾid Bāsh and Sālimah Ṣāliḥ (Kūlūniyā: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2003).

[2] Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: the Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988).

[3] Tord Olsson, "Imagery of Divine Epiphany in Nuṣayrī Scriptures," *Acta Iranica*, no. 28 (1988); Idem, "The Gnosis of the Mountaineers and Townspeople. The Religion of the Syrian Alawites, or the Nuṣairīs," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. E. Özdalga T. Olsson, C. Raudvere (Istanbul: 1998), 200-21.

[4] Meir Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Meir Bar-Asher, "The Iranian Component of the Nuṣayrī Religion," *Iran* 41(2003); Meir Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, "Dogma and ritual in 'Kitāb al-Maʿārif' by the Nuṣayrī theologian Abū Saʿīd Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī," *Arabica* 52, no. 1 (2005).

[5] Yaron Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdān al-Khasībī: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrī-ʿAlawite Sect," *Studia Islamica* 93(2001); Idem, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs: an Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[6] Gizela Procházka-Eisl and Stephen Procházka, *The Plain of Saints and Prophets: the Nusayri-Alawi Community of Cilicia (Southern Turkey) and its Sacred Places* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).

[7] Some titles include: Munīr al-Sharīf, *al-Muslimūn al-ʿAlawīyūn : man hum? wa-ayna hum?* (Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿUmūmīya, 1960); Muḥammad Ghālib al-Ṭawīl, *Tārīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*, second ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1966); Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī, *al-ʿAlawīyūn wa-al-Nuṣayrīyūn* (Beirut1980); Hāshim ʿUthmān, *Hal al-ʿAlawīyūn Shīʿa? : baḥth tārīkhī min wāqiʿ wathāʾiqihim wa-adabīyātihim al-manshūrah wa-ghayr al-manshūrah* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, 1994); Idem, *al-ʿAlawīyūn bayna l-usṭūra wa-l-ḥaqīqa* (Beirut 1994); Jaʿfar al-Kanj Dandashī, *Madkhal ilā al-madhhab al-ʿalawī al-nuṣayrī* (Irbid: al-Rūznā, 2000).

wonder what their secretive religion is really all about. This curiosity is not merely academic. Behind many of the studies, primarily those originating in the Middle East, is the underlying question of whether or not the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs ought to be considered true Muslims, an issue which is extremely important for the political legitimacy of the Asad family in Syria.[8] In the past two years the political unrest in Syria, and the violent efforts of the Asad regime to suppress revolution and sectarian strife, have heightened the international interest in this sect.

But the study of Nuṣayrism has a significance that goes beyond its contemporary political role. The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs are among the few surviving remnants of a heterodox trend that was extremely prevalent in early Islamic times but has for the most part been eliminated. This trend was labeled *ghuluww* (extremism) by the Islamic heresiographers because of the fact that its practitioners were thought to hold an excessive reverence for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, believing them to be manifestations of God on earth. Other than the apotheosis of their Imams, these zealous and often revolutionary Shiite sectarians took an esoteric and allegorical stance towards the Quran and an antinomian, even libertine, attitude towards Islamic Law. They preached a pantheistic theology of divine light and looked towards the transmigration of souls as an alternative to the Islamic theodicy of heaven and hell. From the reports of the Islamic theologians and historians who polemicized against them, it seems that their religion was a syncretistic amalgam of Shiism and many of the Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian ideas pervading the Near East in Late Antiquity. In a sense it can be understood as the theological embodiment of the formative period of Islamic history when the older faiths of

[8] For an analysis of the Nuṣayrī efforts to establish Islamic legitimacy see Sabrina Mervin, "Quelques jalons pour une histoire du rapprochements (*taqrīb*) des alaouites vers le chiisme," in *Islamstudien ohne Ende: Festschrift für Werner Ende zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Rainer Brunner (Würzburg: 2002), 281-88; Kais M. Firro, "The ʿAlawīs in Modern Syria: From Nuṣayrīya to Islam via ʿAlawīya," *Der Islam* 82, no. 1 (2005): 1-31.

the region encountered a nascent Islam that was still flexible and accommodating enough to allow old and new beliefs to coexist.

The fusion that resulted was a considerable threat to the budding Islamic orthodoxy and both Sunni and Shiite *ʿulemāʾ* expended great effort to quash these heterodox trends in their society. For the most part this endeavor has been successful, and while some of the ideals of the *ghulāt* have been sublimated within the theosophical strands of mainstream Islamic society, the actual sectarian communities from which these ideals emerged have disappeared into the annals of history. The Nuṣayrīs are a notable exception to this rule. Not only have they survived into modern times, they have now achieved political power, a turn of events which may ironically prove to be their undoing as it exposes them to the very real threat of assimilation.

As the repositories of the religion of the *ghulāt*, the books of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs represent some of the only surviving primary sources we have for knowing what these sectaries actually believed, as opposed to what their theological and political opponents imputed to them. Unfortunately for scholarly interest in this sect, the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs practice a religiously mandated secrecy, considering the sharing of religious truths with outsiders to be the most fundamental crime a believer can commit against his faith. This reticence is in part utilitarian, as it allows Nuṣayrīs to avoid being persecuted for their beliefs, but it is also theological. Like many esoteric and gnostic groups before them, Nuṣayrīs believe that religious knowledge must be hidden from the masses and may only be revealed to the worthy after a rigorous process of initiation involving many stages. For this reason, sources have always been a problem for those wanting to study the Nuṣayrī faith, and every manuscript to fall into the hands of Western scholars has been a major acquisition that has often overturned assumptions previously prevalent in the field.

Thus the Western study of the Nuṣayrī religion has always been intimately tied to the search for sources. This began in the nineteenth century when European travelers and missionaries first became aware of Islamic sectaries living in the mountains of northern Syria and started collecting whatever books of theirs they could find. The earliest scholarly articles on this faith, notably those written by Joseph Catafago in the 1840's,[9] were often simply descriptions of new Nuṣayrī manuscripts, and it is these same manuscripts, now housed in the major libraries of Western Europe, which have served as our primary sources for the last century and a half. In the past, scholars wanting to write about the sect were forced to cull what information they could from these few primary sources, from the hostile account of the nineteenth century Nuṣayrī apostate Sulaymān al-Adhanī,[10] and from the polemical reports of Islamic heresiographers. Needless to say, knowledge of this sect has been extremely spotty, and most scholars have therefore limited their analyses to individual texts rather than to synthesized accounts of Nuṣayrī doctrine.

However, over the last decade a major development has completely changed the course of this field. This is the recent publication of dozens of hitherto unavailable Nuṣayrī manuscripts by an underground Lebanese press named the Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa (House for the Sake of Knowledge). These publications have appeared in a series, currently consisting of ten volumes, entitled *Silsilāt al-Turath al-ʿAlaw*ī (the ʿAlawite Heritage Series). The primary editor of this series, who uses the pseudonym Abū Mūsā [al-Ḥarīrī], is known from a previous publication,[11] as well as from his introductory comments to these volumes, to be quite hostile to the ʿAlawite

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[9] These will be discussed in detain in Chapter Three.

[10] Sulayman al-Adhanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya fī kashf asrār al-diyāna al-Nuṣayriyya* (Beirut 1862); partially translated in Edward Salisbury, "The Book of Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit Disclosing the Nosairian Religion," *JAOS* 8(1864). This text will also be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

[11] al-Ḥarīrī, *al-ʿAlawīyūn wa-al-Nuṣayrīyūn*.

religion. It seems that his incentive for publishing these works was to give evidence of the heterodoxy of the sect, along the lines of the debate described above. But despite his polemical agenda, it is clear from comparisons with other available sources that his manuscripts are authentic and, for the most part, well edited. Although he does not provide information about his acquisition of these texts, he names as a secondary editor a Shaykh Mūsā, perhaps implying that he received these from a Nuṣayrī shaykh, who also served as his consultant for doctrinal and historical matters.

Considering the sensitive material contained in these books it is not surprising that they are banned in Syria, and also quite difficult to purchase elsewhere in the Middle East. They are however available in several of the major Western university libraries, and have already attracted considerable attention from the latest generation of students of Islamic heterodoxy.[12] The wealth of information that has suddenly become available has demanded a complete reformulation of everything we thought we knew about this sect and the heterodox milieu from which it emerged. The first book to be based on these publications, a survey of the Nuṣayrī religion by Yaron Friedman, was published in 2010, replacing the previous survey of the faith written over a century before in 1900 by René Dussaud.[13] Although Friedman's work only employs six of the ten volumes now available in this series (as well as the previously available materials), his careful explanations and meticulous footnotes have opened the field to more in-depth studies, such as my own.

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[12] See, for example, S.W. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba and the Origins of Shīʿism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), and the recent dissertation by Mushegh Asatyran, "Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: the Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-tradition" (Yale University, 2012), both of which look at these texts to better understand early Imāmī Shiism.

[13] René Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairīs* (Paris: Librairie Émile Bouillon, 1900).

My own study tackles the issue at the core of our search for sources, namely, the secrecy of the sect and the process of initiation by which believers are introduced to their faith. Unlike other religions that entertain esoteric or mystical doctrines at the margins of their communities, as for example the Kabbalah in Judaism or Sufism within Islam, Nuṣayrism is a religion entirely predicated on notions of secrecy and initiation. Ideals of concealment and revelation permeate the most fundamental Nuṣayrī doctrines of cosmology and sacred history. They informed the original sectarian impulse in the fourth/tenth century and are reinforced each generation as new novices acquire their sectarian identities through individual initiation. The Nuṣayrī religion is at its core an initiatory cult structured around the preservation and careful transmission of secret religious beliefs. This basic definition has not changed despite the sect's evolution from an urban secret society to a mountainous tribal community (and most recently, to a cosmopolitan ruling elite). If before the secret had to be kept from hostile neighbors, now it is withheld from uninitiated family members, women, and children. The lines of exclusivity are maintained because they are essential to the faith, and not merely an incidental feature of it.

In previous studies of secrecy in Twelver (Imāmī) Shiism, and I refer specifically to the works of Kohlberg,[14] Amir Moezzi,[15] Makarem,[16] Clarke,[17] Dakake,[18] and Stewart,[19] a

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[14] Etan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-Shīʿī Views on Taqiyya," *JAOS* 95, no. 3 (1975): 395-402; Idem, "Taqiyya in Shīʿī Theology and Religion," in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 345-80.

[15] M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: the Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York, 1994); Idem, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I. B. Tauris; The Institute for Ismaili Studies 2011).

[16] Sami Makarem, *al-Taqiyya fī al-Islām* (London: Druze Heritage Foundation, 2004).

[17] L. Clarke, "The Rise and Decline of *Taqiyya* in Twelver Shiʿism," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Taurus and Institute for Ismaili Studies, 2005), 46-64.

[18] Maria Massi Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shiʿite Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006): 324-55.

distinction is made between the concepts of *taqiyya*, meaning precautionary dissimulation, and *kitmān*, meaning concealment for reasons of esotericism and exclusivity. As these scholars have already pointed out, *taqiyya* was extremely important in the early years of Shiism when support for an Imam was thought to be synonymous with revolutionary activity. Shiites were therefore encouraged to hide the identities of their leaders and even to lie about their own affiliations with this cause. *Kitmān*, on the other hand, related to some of the gnostic doctrines taught by the Imams that were thought to be too powerful for the masses and were instead reserved for a Shiite elite. While both these concepts are present in the Nuṣayrī religion, which after all emerged from the Imāmī milieu, the distinction between the two forms of secrecy becomes somewhat artificial in the sectarian context. By projecting their sectarian struggle onto the primordial world, Nuṣayrīs imbued even the mundane concept of *taqiyya* with esoteric significance, so that dissimulation for purposes of survival becomes a sally in the cosmic struggle to hide the truth from the Devil and his descendants, the unbelievers.

Moreover, while the actual period of secretiveness for Twelver Shiites was mainly limited to the early years of Islam, secrecy for the Nuṣayrīs is still very much alive. In addition, it is not just an abstract religious ideal, as has long been the case for the Twelvers; it is a carefully legislated policy protected by steep processes of initiation, ordeals, oaths, and threats of violence. Members of the community are taught to hide their participation from the outside world and to identify strangers as fellow believers through secret signs of recognition. It is quite amazing to see that even in this age of mass communication and the free spread of ideas, a Lebanese ʿAlawite shaykh can still publically insist that "[People] invent stories about our deification of Imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, God forbid! We believe in the one and only Allah and follow his

[19] Devin J. Stewart, "*Taqiyyah* as Performance: The Travels of Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī in the Ottoman Empire (991-93/1583-85)," in *Law and Sciety in Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers), 1-70.

Prophet Muhammad's path."[20] While many details of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī faith are still obscure, their belief in the divinity of ʿAlī has been widely known for a millennium. Nevertheless, it is denied because it is religiously forbidden (and politically dangerous) to admit it.

In many respects, the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion conforms to the basic structure of a secret society identified by Simmel[21] and further developed by Hazelrigg,[22] Erickson,[23] and many others. [24] Some of these include self-sufficiency, seclusion from the outside world, degrees of initiation, group egoism, and a rejection of the societal norms of the general environment. Although comparisons to this literature are not explicitly drawn in the main chapters of this study, certain preliminary comments towards a theory of secrecy are distilled in the conclusion of this dissertation. Likewise left for the conclusion are explicit comparisons with the universal rites and symbols of initiation studied by Eliade,[25] van Gennep,[26] Fontaine,[27] and numerous other scholars working in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and religious studies.

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[20] Mohamed Nazzal, "Lebanon's Alawi: A Minority Struggles in a 'Nation' of Sects," *al-Akhbar (english)* 11/ 8/ 2011.

[21] Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (1950), 330-76.

[22] Lawrence E. Hazelrigg, "A Reexamination of Simmel's "The Secret and the Secret Society": Nine Propositions," *Social Forces* 47, no. 3 (1969): 323-30.

[23] Bonnie H. Erickson, "Secret Societies and Social Structure," *Social Forces* 60, no. 1 (1981): 188-210.

[24] These similarities are not merely structural and not necesarilly inadvertent. From the early Twentieth Century there have been attempts to connect the historical roots of Western Freemasonry to the Nuṣayrī religion. See Bernard H. Springett, *Secret Sects of Syria and Lebanon: a Consideration of their Origin, Creeds, and Religious Ceremonies, and their Connection with and Influence Upon Modern Freemasonry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922). For a more recent attempt see Jean-Marc Aractingi and Christian Lochon, *Secrets Initiatiques en Islam et Rituels Maçonniques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).

[25] Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1958).

[26] Ardold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

[27] J. S. La Fontaine, *Initiation*, Themes in Social Anthropologie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

By way of introduction, though, let it be stated that the Nuṣayrī process is a rare and detailed example of the gestational model of initiation, according to which the novice is thought to return to a symbolic womb and to be reborn to a spiritual existence. The unique contribution of the Nuṣayrīs is their introduction of an underlying sexual metaphor, which likens the transmission of religious truths to sexual intercourse. Proceeding from this metaphor Nuṣayrīs structure the first stage of initiation as a spiritual marriage between master and disciple, which can then eventually lead to a spiritual gestation and rebirth according to the traditional model. This feature of initiation, and the detail with which it is legislated, is unique to the Nuṣayrīs, and should be of interest to scholars studying this process in other traditions.

Most earlier works on the Nuṣayrī religion have given some attention to the rites of initiation,[28] primarily basing their analyses on two sources, the eighteenth century *Sharḥ al-imām*[29] and the personal account of the nineteenth century apostate al-Adhanī, both of which will be discussed in Chapter Three. The present study, however, is the first in-depth treatment of this aspect of the faith and is based on many more sources than have previously been available. In addition to the European manuscripts and the ten volumes of the *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī* described above, my dissertation employs two unpublished manuscripts that I personally discovered or rediscovered.

The first is an early nineteenth century *Kitāb al-Mashyakha* (manual for shaykhs). This manuscript has quite a long history in the field of Nuṣayrī studies. In 1860 it served as the basis for the first monograph on the Nuṣayrī religion, entitled *The Asian Mystery: The Ansaireeh or*

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[28] Discussions of this topic can be found in Samual Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: The Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 159-65; Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairīs*: 104-19; Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis*: 303-15; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*: 372-81; Olsson, "Gnosis of the Mountaineers," 216-17; Meir Bar Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, "A Catechism of the Nuṣayrī Religion," in *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion* (2002), 163-6; Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 210-22; Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints*: 90-2.

[29] Found in MS Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe. 155a-167a.

Nusairis of Syria, written by the Reverend Samuel Lyde, a British missionary in the Latakia region. However, for the last one hundred and fifty years it has been presumed to be lost. Over the course of my research I located this manuscript and several partial copies in libraries around Europe. Its rediscovery allows access to a long description of initiation, otherwise known only from Lyde's translated extracts. It also sheds new light on several related initiatory texts, including the well-known *K. taʿlīm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya* (the catechism of the Nuṣayrī religion), recently studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky,[30] which, as I am able to demonstrate, is a digest of Lyde's text.

The second manuscript is a late nineteenth century educational manual for novices. Found in Cairo, it contains one of only three known copies of the *Dustūr,* the canon of prayers that make up Nuṣayrī liturgy, and a detailed commentary on this text. It also includes several alternate Quranic chapters, secretly preserved by the sect. Its most exciting contribution, however, is the instruction it provides for several ritually trangressive practices, including guest prostitution, incest, and the orgiastic night. While opponents of the Nuṣayrīs have always accused them of ritual libertinism, there has never been any evidence to support these charges. My manuscript includes the first internal proof that some of these rites were observed. While the contents of this text are studied throughout the dissertation, an appendix dedicated to these rituals, including a transcription and translation of the relevant chapters, is given at the end of the dissertation.

As this study is limited to the literary sources and is not based on fieldwork, no information is provided regarding the current state of initiation among the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs. A few words can be found about the declining rate of initiation among the ʿAlawite men of

[30] Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 163-221.

Southern Turkey in the Procházkas' recent study of this region.[31] However, there is no information for how political power and (at least a seeming) secularization have affected the Syrian ʿAlawite population. One observation that can be made regarding the secretiveness of the sect is that while membership seems to have acquired a certain public cachet, so that contemporary ʿAlawites are eager to announce their affiliation with this group, this openness does not extend to discussing the contents of their doctrines or their initiation ceremonies. Regarding this aspect of their identity, present day ʿAlawites remain as reticent as ever and now even have executive power to protect this information from public dissemination. I leave it to future scholars of the field, or perhaps to a time and location where Nuṣayrī identity is less politically charged, to analyze the most recent developments in this story.

Summary of Dissertation Chapters:

The dissertation is divided into three sections. Part I, entitled "Formulating an initiatory society," explores some of the theoretical discussions of secrecy and initiation written by the early founders of the sect in the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries. Part II, entitled, "Sources and Stage Directions," analyzes the ways in which initiation was conducted in practice, according to sources ranging from the twelfth to fourteenth/eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Part III investigates the survival of ritual libertinism among some Nuṣayrī communities in the nineteenth century.

The breakdown of the main chapters of the dissertation is as follows: **Chapter One**, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ and the Role of the *Bāb* (gate)," opens with the question of why,

[31] Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints*: 90-2. The reason for this decline, as described by the authors, is that the latest generations of Turkish ʿAlawites do not grow up learning Arabic and so are unable to memorize the prayers required for initiation.

considering their strict insistence on secrecy, the Nuṣayrīs revere several of the notorious Islamic heretics who publically preached the divinity of the Imams. Following the stories told by al-Khaṣībī, the fourth/tenth century founder of the sect, about ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ, the arch-heretic of Islam and the purported father of *ghuluww*, this chapter uncovers the pattern of concealment and revelation that underlies the Nuṣayrī trinity, and which, by extension, informs their ideas of education, dissimulation, and initiation. A short excursus at the end explores a possible Imāmī origin for al-Khaṣībī's Ibn Sabaʾ story.

Chapter Two, "Marriage, Birth, and *Bāṭinī Taʾwīl*," analyzes the legal responsa relating to initiation of the fifth/eleventh century Nuṣayrī scholar al-Ṭabarānī. It describes how Nuṣayrīs structured initiation according to the life-cycle stages of marriage, birth, and breastfeeding, and how the perceived familial bonds resulting from these stages were instrumental in constructing the Nuṣayrī sectarian identity. This chapter also demonstrates how Nuṣayrīs modeled the laws regulating initiation on precise parallels to Islamic family law. The detail with which this analogy was sustained reveals the familiarity of the Nuṣayrīs with the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence, dispelling widespread notions to the contrary.

Chapter Three, "Discovering the Tools of Initiation," focuses on the question of sources. It describes the manuals, catechisms, teaching aids, and personal accounts that provide information on how Nuṣayrī initiation was conducted in practice the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Both the history of the sources within the Nuṣayrī community and that of their acquisition and use by western scholars are detailed. Specific attention is given to my two newly discovered manuscripts and to the light they shed on the founding of the field of Nuṣayrī studies in the nineteenth century.

Chapter Four, “The initiation Ceremonies,” describes the rites, postures and prayers that make up the three main ceremonies of Nuṣayrī initiation. This is the longest chapter in the dissertation, as it not only explains the stage directions, but also sets out the doctrines alluded to in the various rituals, many of which have, for lack of sources, previously been misunderstood. Some of these include the appearance of God in light, the transubstantiation of God’s body into wine, docetism, the transmigration of souls, antinomianism, and the obligation of secrecy. There is an excursus at the end that provides a translation of a long discourse read to the novice during initiation and a second excursus on the secret codes by which Nuṣayrīs were taught to recognize each other among strangers.

Part I: Formulating an Initiatory Society

Theoretical Discussions of Initiation from the Fourth and Fifth/Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Chapter One: ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ and the role of the *Bāb*

Rehabilitating the Heresiarchs of the Islamic Tradition

For a sect that places a premium on religious secrecy the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs tell an inordinate number of stories in praise of men who revealed the secret. By this I refer to several of the notorious Islamic heretics who publically preached the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and, as a result, were denounced and sometimes even executed. Most famous among these is ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ, the converted Jew from Yemen considered by the Islamic theologians to be the arch-heresiarch and father of all religious and political schism in Islam. Other heretics who fit this schema and are nevertheless sanctified in the prayers of the sect include, but are not limited to, Rushayd al-Hajarī, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, and Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, after whom the sect takes its name. Even al-Khaṣībī, the actual founder of the Nuṣayrī religion, can fit into this category. In his early life, he was imprisoned in Baghdad for publically preaching the *dīn al-tawḥīd*, the doctrine of the unity of the Imams. Only through a miraculous escape from jail was he able to embark on his more circumspect mission in Syria.[32] Why do the Nuṣayrīs revere these men? How do they reconcile their public declarations with the very strong exhortations to secrecy that appear everywhere in their literature?

The answer to this dilemma begins with the heresiographical debates surrounding ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ, chronologically the earliest heretic and the one given the most attention in Islamic literature. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the negative stories imputed to him by the Islamic theologians were internalized and reinterpreted by the early Nuṣayrīs in support of their belief in ʿAlī's divinity. Self-consciously embracing his notoriety as a symbol of his

[32] See al-Adhanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra*: 16; MS Taymūr, *ʿAqāʾid* 564, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya), 7-8; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 22-3.

alienation from a disbelieving society, the founders of the Nuṣayrī religion used his life story as the prototype for their understanding of religious martyrdom, a concept that came to have ultimate theological significance just as it lost its practical application. By following this narrative one arrives at the heart of the precarious balance of concealment and revelation that informs the most fundamental dogmas of Nuṣayrī cosmology and sacred history and drives the initiatory process analyzed in the remainder of this study.

ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ in the Heresiographical Tradition

In his recently published *The Caliph and the Heretic*, Anthony traces the evolution of the various motifs that make up the heresiographical biography of Ibn Sabaʾ in the Islamic tradition.[33] The thoroughness of his investigation obviates the need for a full review. Nevertheless certain elements deserve repetition, as they directly bear on the Nuṣayrī characterization of his role.

ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ is always associated with extreme devotion to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. However, in the early centuries of Islam, different notions circulated regarding the exact nature of his heretical speculations. The earliest notion relevant to our discussion is that Ibn Sabaʾ denied ʿAlī's death, insisting that he is merely in occultation and will return as the Mahdī at the end of days. Technically stated Ibn Sabaʾ is said to have originated the doctrines of *waqf*, the cessation of the imamate when a particular imam goes into occultation, and *rajʿa,* the eschatological return of the hidden imam.

Ibn Sabaʾ's association with these doctrines is first attested to in the heresiography of Pseudo Nāshiʾ al-Akbar, identified by Madelung as the Zaydī Muʿtazilite Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb (d.

[33] Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*.

236/850).[34] According to this story, when news of Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's death reached Ibn Sabaʾ in al-Madāʾin (the ancient Ctesiphon), he denied it insisting, "even if you would have brought us his brain in seventy bags, we would still know that he did not die and that he will not die until he drives the Arabs with his staff."[35] This early expression of Ibn Sabaʾ's doctrine, referred to as the 'brain in a bag' motif, epitomizes his fanatical insistence of ʿAlī's continued existence in occultation despite all empirical evidence of his death.[36]

However, as most students of Shiism know, in the mid 3rd/9th century, ideas of occultation, this time referred to as *ghayba*, became orthodox in the Imāmī community. When the Twelfth Shiite Imam, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥassan (al-Mahdī), disappeared without an heir, Imāmī scholars resorted to the very same ideas they had formally considered heretical to deal with their own crisis of leadership. They claimed that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥassan had not died but was merely in hiding, awaiting his return as the glorious Mahdī. Although this belief was now directed at a different man, Ibn Sabaʾ's heresy suddenly seemed too close for comfort, so emphasis shifted to a second narrative.[37]

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[34] See Wilferd Madelung, "Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie: Das *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* des Ǧaʿfar ibn Ḥarb?," *Der Islam* 57 (1980): 220-36.

[35](Ps.-) Nāshiʾ, *Masāʾil al-imāma*, ed. Josef van Ess (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1971), 22. In some accounts this motif is fleshed out further and ʿAlī's death is explained in a docetic vein on the model of Jesus in the Quran, so that the man killed by Ibn Muljam was not ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib but rather a demon disguised to look like him. See, for example, ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *K. al-Farq bayna l-firaq wa bayān al-firqa al-nājiya minhum*, ed. Muḥammad Badr (Cairo: Maktabat Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣabīḥ, 1910), 233-4.

[36] As will be shown below, it is one of the motifs that are later picked up by the Nuṣayrī authors.

[37] As one example see the later Shiite biographical dictionary of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d.726/1325) in which this motif is completely abandoned and full attention is placed on the deification/execution motif described below (Abū Manṣūr al-Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al- ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Maʿrifat al-Rijāl* (Teheran: Mu'assasat Nashr al-Faqāha, 1417 (1997)), II, 372). For an analysis of the shifting concept of Shiite heresy see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīʿa become Sectarian?," *JAOS* 75, no. 1 (1955): 1-13; Wadad al-Qāḍī, "The Development of the term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature wih Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya," in *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, ed. A. Dietrich (Göttingen: 1976), 295-319; R.P. Buckley, "The Early Shiite Ghulāh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* XLII, no. 2 (1997): 301-25.

According to this story, Ibn Saba's heretical invention was the deification of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, addressing him with the honorific, "*anta anta*" ("you are You" i.e. "you are God").[38] When ʿAlī tried to make him recant this belief, Ibn Sabaʾ refused. Having no choice, ʿAlī burned him and his companions in two pits.[39] This story, presented here as a composite of several sources, is told by the Islamic heresiographers with a certain Schadenfreude; not only was the heresiarch Ibn Sabaʾ misguided enough to profess such a doctrine, he was denounced and executed by the very object of his adoration!

The existence of contemporary groups who professed this same doctrine, and even conducted revolutions in its name, made this second narrative particularly attractive.[40] It was important to have a story in which ʿAlī publically repudiated those who believed in his divinity. As the earliest heretic, already responsible for introducing other Shiite speculations, Ibn Sabaʾ

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[38] There is also a nearly identical story preserved by al-Kashshī in which a group of seventy Zuṭṭ, an Indian population, approached ʿAlī after his campaign in Baṣra, insisted that he was God and addressed him with this same '*anta anta huwa.'* When they would not repent he burned them in pits (Abū ʿAmr Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl al-maʿrūf bi-rijāl al-kashshī*, ed. Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawi (Mashhad: Danishgāh-i Mashhad, 1970), 109). See also al-Ṭabarī's account of the Rāwandiyya who, rioting in Baghdad in 157/773, called out the declaration *anta anta*, this time to the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr (Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), III, 418). The expression *anta anta* is significant in Nuṣayrī theology for being the response of the believers in the primordial realm of light when God appeared successively before them in the forms of an old man, a young boy, and a strong man riding on a lion. Despite his changed form, they did not doubt his identity, and instead proclaimed, "Appear in whatever [form] you like and however you wish. For You are You (*anta anta*). We have no doubt about You." (This is a quotation from the *K. al-Usūs*, see fn 82 below.) It should also be mentioned that the expression *anta anta* is the first words of a prayer attributed to ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ found in *MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564*: 28-9, the newly discovered Nuṣayrī MS that will be discussed in Ch 3 and Appendix 1.

[39] There are elements of this story already in the biographical dictionary of the Sunni *ḥadīth* scholar al-Jūzajānī (d.259 / 872). See Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Yaʿqūb al-Jūzajānī, *Aḥwāl al-Rijāl*, ed. Ṣubḥī al-Badrī al-Sāmarrāʾī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1985), 37-8.

[40] I refer of course to the Kufan *ghulāt* (the Kaysāniyya, Bayāniyya, Mughīriyya, Manṣūriyya, Janāḥiyya, Khaṭṭābiyya etc.) and the numerous Khurramite groups who revolted in Iran and Iraq in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods. The deification/execution motif was likely introduced into the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative as a particular polemic against these sects. For investigations of these revolutionary Shiite movements see Elton L. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan Under Abbasid Rule, 747-820* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1979); William F. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shīʿite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Regional Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

became the perfect target.[41] Thus he was reinvented in the 3rd/9th century as the originator of this great heresy, which could then be denounced by ʿAlī in the clearest possible terms.[42]

The efficacy of this narrative for the heresiographical agenda quickly ensured its widespread adoption. Its obvious problem was that it contradicted the earlier account in which Ibn Sabaʾ denies ʿAlī's death. If Alī executed Ibn Sabaʾ for preaching his divinity, how could he be around to reject ʿAlī's death in al-Madāʾin years later? In trying to reconcile these two traditions, the Islamic heresiographers came up with several solutions. For example, al-Nawbakhtī (d. 300-310/912-923) explains that although ʿAlī intended to execute Ibn Sabaʾ, he was advised that it was politically inexpedient to do so, considering Ibn Sabaʾ's staunch advocacy of his caliphate. Instead he banished him to al-Madāʾin.[43] Perhaps not content with this solution, which after all portrays ʿAlī in a somewhat compromising light, the Sunni

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[41] As evidence of this hypothesis, one finds numerous *ḥadīth* in which Ibn Sabaʾ is denounced as the greatest liar against ʿAlī, followed by al-Mukhtār, Bayān b. Samʿān, al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and other contemporary heresiarchs who professed the divinity of ʿAlī. (See Muḥammad Bāqir ibn Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1956-1973), II: 217-18, XXV: 2263). Al-Ṭabarī and al-Nawbakhtī also report that some of these heretics, notably Bayān b. Samʿān and al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd, were executed by fire, which may be why this particular punishment was chosen for Ibn Sabaʾ. (See al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*: II, 1620; al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa* (Najaf, Iraq: al-Heideria Press, 1959), 50).

[42] One can also find a related sub-narrative in which ʿAlī publically curses ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ for lying about his divinity. See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 106-9; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*: XXV: 286-7.

[43] Saʿīd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Teheran: Ḥaydarī, 1963), 20; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*: 44. The fifth/eleventh century Sunni heresiographer al-Baghdādī fleshes this solution out most extensively. In his account there are two heretics involved in this story: Ibn Sabaʾ is the one to deify ʿAlī while Ibn al-Sawdāʾ is the false Jewish convert who sought to corrupt Islam and therefore joined the Sabaʾiyya. Al-Baghdādī writes, "When [ʿAlī] was informed of Ibn al-Sawdā's extravagant attitude towards him, he planned to kill him, but Ibn ʿAbbās dissuaded him from doing it, saying to him: if you kill him, your supporters will part company with you, and since you are set on resuming war with the Syrians, you will have to honor your men. Since he feared the sedition which Ibn ʿAbbās foresaw as a result of his and Ibn Saba's execution he banished the two into al-Madāʾin" (al-Baghdādī, *K. al-Farq* 235.) (Translation adapted from Abraham S. Halkin, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (al-Farḳ Bain al-Firaḳ) Being the History of the Various Philosophic Systems Developed in Islam by Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī*, trans. Abraham S. Halkin (Tel Aviv: Palestine Publishing, 1935), 44.) Anthony identified the earliest scholar to harmonize these accounts in this fashion as the Shiite Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Thaqafī (d. 314/926), who redacted a still earlier account of the Shiite scholar ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Nawfalī (early 3rd/9th c.). Al-Thaqafī's account is quoted in the *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha* of Ibn Abī ʾl-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258). See Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*: 165-72.

heresiographer al-Malaṭī (d. 377/987) explains that some of Ibn Sabaʾ's followers survived the auto-da-fé and they, not Ibn Sabaʾ, were the ones to deny ʿAlī's death.[44]

ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ in the *Ghulāt* Tradition

As this literary conundrum was debated in Kufa, the *ghulāt* came up with their own solution: The reason that Ibn Sabaʾ could be killed in ʿAlī's lifetime and then deny his death years later is that he had been resurrected, or that his death was merely docetic.[45] They claimed that Ibn Sabaʾ's execution was just a pretense, a showy act of dissimulation that allowed ʿAlī to publically deny his divinity and thereby hide this secret under the most impenetrable shroud of *taqiyya*. For his role in this drama, Ibn Sabaʾ was considered a religious martyr (or near-martyr), and his flagrant breach of secrecy was understood as a selfless act undertaken at ʿAlī's command in order to set the stage for this grand deception. With this explanation the *ghulāt* were able to undermine the very objective of the execution motif. Instead of disproving ʿAlī's divinity, Ibn Sabaʾ's execution came to represent the devotion of the believers, on the one hand, and the gullibility of the unbelievers, on the other.

Moreover, the *ghulāt* claimed that the execution was intended for a dual audience. It was staged to fool the ignorant, but for those who could read the *bāṭinī* (esoteric) subtext, it proclaimed the truth of the very doctrine it exoterically denied. With their typical *taʾwīl* (esoteric interpretation), the *ghulāt* mined the narrative for clues of ʿAlī's divinity. They found this in

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[44] Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Malaṭī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-radd ʿalā ahl al-ahwāʾ wa-l-bidaʿ*, ed. Sven Dedering (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Dawlah, 1936), 25.

[45] To clarify, I do not presume that the concept of Ibn Sabaʾ's resurrection directly emerged out of this debate; there is evidence in the heresiographies that several of the *ghulāt* sects proclaimed the resurrection or ascension of their executed leaders. This instance may simply be an extension of that idea to the quasi-historical Ibn Sabaʾ. However, as will be demonstrated, it is fairly obvious from the sources that the *ghulāt* narrative of Ibn Sabaʾ's execution and resurrection developed in conversation with the orthodox literary tradition.

ʿAlī's choice to execute Ibn Sabaʾ by fire.[46] There is a well-known *ḥadīth* that states that, "None may punish with fire except for the Lord of fire."[47] In general, this *ḥadīth* was understood to be proscriptive rather than descriptive. However, in the context of the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative, the *ghulāt* interpreted ʿAlī's choice to execute by fire as an explicit demonstration of his divinity.

We know that mainstream Sunni and Shiite scholars were aware of some elements of this reinterpretation. For example, in his account of Ibn Sabaʾ's execution, the 4th/10th century historian al-Maqdisī (fl. 355/966) writes: "When [Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers] entered the fire, they laughed, saying 'now it is confirmed to us that you are a God because none may punish by fire except the Lord of fire.'"[48] Al-Maqdisī has clearly woven *ghulāt* elements into his narration. In fact, without explaining its import, he even includes the piece de resistance of the *ghulāt* hermeneutic, i.e. the resurrection or docetic death of the martyrs. He writes, "After [the execution] their brothers claimed that the fire did not harm them, rather it became cold and safe for them as it had for Ibrāhīm."[49]

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[46] As Anthony has already noted, this element of the story was likely borrowed from earlier traditions in which ʿAlī executes a group of unspecified *zindīqs* by fire. (See Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*: 173-80.) Moreover, as both Bayān b. Samʿān and al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd are reported to have been executed by fire (see fn 10 above), it has also been suggested that the tradition arose in order to justify (or merely reflect) current Umayyad practices of executing heretics by fire. (See Israel Friedländer, "ʿAbdallāh b. Sabā, der Begründer der Šīʿa, und sein jüdischer Ursprung," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 23(1909-1910): 321.)

[47] See Muḥammad b. Ismāʾīl al-Bukhārī, *Le recueil des traditions mahométanes (= al-Jāmī al-ṣaḥīḥ)*, ed. Krehl and Juynboll (Leiden: Brill, 1862-1907), II:238.(Jihād 56); Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Miṣr: Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā Muḥammad, 1935), III:55 (#2673 and 2675)

[48] Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Badʾ wal-taʾrīkh*, ed. Clément Huart (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1916), V, 125.

[49] Ibid. For Ibrāhīm and the fire, see Q21: 69.

Al-Khaṣībī's Account of the Ibn Sabaʾ Story

In this case we needn't rely on the Islamic heresiographical literature to learn the details of this *ghulāt* tradition. It has survived in several sectarian texts including the proto-Nuṣayrī *Umm al-Kitāb* preserved in Persian by the Ismāʿīlīs of Central Asia and the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Persian *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, both of which will be discussed later. However, the most extensive retelling of this story, and the one that reflects the greatest awareness of the heresiographical debate, can be found in the *Risāla al-rāstbāshiyya* [from the Persian *rāst bāsh*, be righteous!] and its commentary, the *Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya*, both written by al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/958),[50] the founder of the Nuṣayrī religion. The *R. al-rāstbāshiyya*, which systematically lays out the beliefs of the sect, has long been considered one of the foundational texts of Nuṣayrism.[51] In fact, it is reported to have inspired al-Ṭabarānī's conversion and is extensively quoted in his *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād*. However, the full text of the *R. al-rāstbāshiyya* only became available for study in 2006 when it was published by the Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa in the *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī* 2. An analysis of its content, and particularly its reinterpretation of the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative, reveals much for the intertextuality of Nuṣayrī and Imāmī literature, and demonstrates the way in which *ghulāt* traditions often emerged in conversation with mainstream Imāmī scholarship.

In al-Khaṣībī's *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya* the Ibn Sabaʾ story is presented as the culmination of a list of miracles in which ʿAlī resurrects the dead.[52] These include his revival of the people of the

[50] According to one Nuṣayrī *ḥadīth* al-Khaṣībī died on 14 Dhū al-Qaʿda 346/6 Febuary 958. See *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*, ed. Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 8 (*Majmūʿat al-Aḥādīth al-ʿAlawiyya*) (Diyār ʿAql, Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 2008), 158.

[51] For a summary of its content see Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 253-4.

[52] al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-Rāstbāshiyya*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 2 (Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya) (Diyār 'Aql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifa, 2006), 34-7. This structure

cave,[53] a Jewish leader and 17 rabbis found in the well of ʿAqīq in Medina,[54] the skull of Kisrā in al-Madāʾin,[55] and finally and in greatest detail, Ibn Sabaʾ and his companions. Perhaps addressing the discrepancy over where the resurrection was supposed to have taken place, al-Khaṣībī gives three separate narratives, each set in a different time and locale.

The first is set during the lifetime of the prophet Muḥammad. This is significantly earlier than the other known Ibn Sabaʾ stories that occur during the caliphate of ʿUthmān or ʿAlī. The story begins in Yemen where Ibn Sabaʾ and ten companions, among them a certain Abū Bakr al-Jammāl,[56] publically announce the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in the mosques, streets, and markets of Ṭāʾif. Upon hearing their declarations, the people of Ṭāʾif seize them and forcibly bring them to the Kaʿba in Mecca, where the prophet admonishes them three times and warns them that he will "chastise them with the punishment of God" if they do not repent. Confused by this warning the Muslims ask Muḥammad, "But the punishment of God is the fire, so how can the prophet of God punish with it when he says to us, 'none can punish with fire except the Lord of fire.' How can someone other than God chastise them with the punishment of God?" Ignoring this question, Muḥammad passes the Sabaʾiyya over to ʿAlī who burns them in the fire. Arriving on the scene, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās, the mutual cousin of the prophet and ʿAlī, asks, "O prophet of God, the Muslims heard you say, 'none can punish with fire except the Lord of fire,'

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shows his reliance on an earlier Imāmī tradition attributed to ʿAmmār al-Ṣābātī. See the excursus at the end of this chapter.

[53] This is the story told in Q18: 9-26 of a group of monotheists who, fleeing persecution, hid in a cave where they were made to sleep for three hundred years until the area had become receptive to monotheism.

[54] This is the well of Rūma, in the valley of ʿAqīq in Medina that ʿUthman bought from a Jew and donated to the Muslim community. I am unaware of the story of ʿAlī's revival of Jewish bodies found in that well.

[55] See the excursus at the end of this chapter for more details about this story.

[56] I have not been able to identify this man, but he must have been a known *ghālī* to receive particular notice in al-Khaṣībī's story. It is likely that the key to tracing the origins of the Ṭāʾif story, which does not appear outside Nuṣayrī sources, lies with this man.

but this ʿAlī burned those people with fire and punished them with it." Avoiding a direct affirmation of ʿAlī's divinity, Muḥammad simply says, "Haven't I already informed you people that ʿAlī's actions are my actions and my actions are God's actions, so what do you deny?" In other words, he misled them with an exoteric explanation: that ʿAlī simply acted in his borrowed capacity as God's representative on earth. This appeased the Muslims but three days later Ibn Sabaʾ and his companions appeared resurrected in Kufa.[57]

The above story includes the fullest articulation of the chastisement by fire as proof of divinity motif. If somewhat heavy-handed, it shows the Muslims persistently failing to recognize ʿAlī's divinity, despite their awareness of the *ḥadīth* and its implications. It shows them repeatedly asking its meaning, but refusing to connect the dots and accept the explanation that is so blatantly obvious to the readers of this text. Ibn al-ʿAbbas's particular role in this story can probably be read as an anti-ʿAbbasid polemic. As the ancestor of the ʿAbbasid dynasty, his inability to see ʿAlī's true divine nature foreshadows his grandchildren's usurpation of the ʿAlid imams' legitimate claim to rule.

Al-Khaṣībī's second story is set in Kufa during the Caliphate of ʿAlī, the traditional time and location for the execution narrative. In this story Alī places Ibn Sabaʾ and his companions in pits, kindles a fire, and recites fifty-five *takbīrāt*, five for each of the eleven men killed. This is the typical prayer recited over the dead and its inclusion is meant to show that ʿAlī truly killed them. However, in this account ʿAlī also adds several verses from *sūrat al-burūj* (Q85: 1-9). This *sūra* tells the story of the companions of the pit, a group of believers burned to death in a pit for their faith. It describes how the unbelievers who attacked them watched the fire burn, "fully

[57] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 36. This story is further analyzed in the *Fiqh al-Risāla al-Rāstbāshiyya* where al-Khaṣībī explains that although ʿAlī performed the miracle, it should actually be ascribed to Muḥammad, because his lifetime is the period of the speech of the *ism* and silence of the *maʿnā*. ʿAlī does not actively show his power until after Muḥammad's death ('*ghayba*'). (See Idem, *Fiqh al-Risāla*: 107-8.)

conscious of what they were doing to the believers, whom they hate for no other reason than that they believe in God." It then warns the unbelievers that their treachery will not go unanswered, and that both persecutors and martyrs will receive their comeuppance in the afterlife. This recitation is obviously a very strong endorsement of Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers, and al-Khaṣībī claims that it was revealed in Muḥammad's time with them in mind.

Al-Khaṣībī then describes how the following day ʿAlī brought them back to life. When the people saw them going about their daily business, "sitting at the doors of their homes, in their shops, and walking in the markets and streets" dressed in green clothes and smelling of otherworldly perfumes,[58] they rushed to ʿAlī demanding an explanation. He responds, "I burned them in the fire yesterday and I covered them in their pit while you watched. Then I prayed over them while you bore witness. If God revived them after this, then God does as He wills."[59] ʿAlī's reputation is free from any blame associated with these men. If God wanted them brought back to life that is His business, make of it what you will.

Al-Khaṣībī's final story is set in al-Madāʾin, where Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers once again appear, this time during the reign of the fourth Umayyad Caliph, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam. Since Marwān only ruled for a few months, we can actually put a date to when this story is set, namely the year 65/685. Al-Khaṣībī relates the well known Shiite legend of how the third Umayyad Caliph, Muʾāwiya b. Yazīd, repenting of the crimes his family had committed against the ʿAlids, sought to abdicate the throne to the Shiite Imam ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. However, when Muʾawiya died prematurely, the caliphate passed instead to Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, of a

[58] This is an obvious reference to their having been in heaven, where, as described in Q18: 31, believers are adorned with garments of green silk and brocade.

[59] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 35.

different Umayyad line. Protesting this injustice, Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers appeared in al-Madāʾin, proclaiming that which they had already said in Ṭāʾif and Kufa.[60]

Al-Khaṣībī relates that when the Muslims in al-Madāʾin took Ibn Sabaʾ and burned him he recited Q72: 19-20, "Whenever *ʿAbd Allāh* stands up in prayer to Him, they would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds. Say: 'I invoke my Sustainer alone, for I do not ascribe divinity to anyone beside Him.'" The word *ʿAbd Allāh* in the verse (literally, a 'servant of God') is here used as a prophetic reference to ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ and the persecution he faces whenever he stands in prayer to ʿAlī. Thus, with Quranic confirmation on his lips, Ibn Sabaʾ once again dies a martyr's death.

However, as in the previous two instances, we know that his death will not last. In a stunning reversal of the original heresiographical motif, al-Khaṣībī adds that when news of the execution reached the Imam ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn he insisted, "Even had I seen the brain of Ibn Sabaʾ and the brains of his companions wrapped in a bag, I would still testify that they are alive and subsisting."[61] Thus, the motif comes full circle; from the earliest heresiographical accounts in which Ibn Sabaʾ denies ʿAlī's death by asserting that his brain in a bag would not be sufficient proof of his demise, to ʿAlī's grandchild insisting the same for Ibn Sabaʾ.

Al-Khaṣībī also adds that on that day in al-Madāʾin, Ibn Sabaʾ was burned five times and there is no doubt that a sixth and seventh burning will also take place.[62] While I can only

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[60] Ibid., 36-7. This is just a few years prior to when the first Kufan *ghulāt* revolt took place in 66-7/686-7 under the leadership al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafī in the name of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya. Could al-Khaṣībī's story be a reference to the activities of that important Shiite rebellion (albeit, one that has taken on a Ḥusaynid instead of a Ḥanafī interpretation)?

[61] Ibid., 37.

[62] Ibid. This is also repeated in the *R. al-Andiya* where al-Jillī writes that Ibn Sabaʾ "was killed six times, and the seventh time will be greater than those that preceded and followed." (See Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Jillī, *Risālat al-Andiya*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 2 (*Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya*) (Diyār ʿAql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifah, 2006), 331.

speculate on the significance of this detail, it is clear that al-Khaṣībī has turned Ibn Sabaʾ into a figure that repeatedly appears throughout history to announce ʿAlī's divinity. In a demonstration of his devotion and in order to hide this secret from the unworthy, he is executed, together with his followers, and then he rises, literally phoenix-like from the ashes, in the ultimate affirmation of his claims, which are nevertheless only understood by the few.

The multiplicity of Ibn Sabaʾ's appearances in the *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya* may explain the idiosyncratic nature of the Ibn Sabaʾ story found in the *Umm al-Kitāb*. This book, preserved in Persian by the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī's of Central Asia, is not a Nuṣayrī text.[63] However, it derives from the same Kufan *ghulāt* circles that produced Nuṣayrī theology and therefore assumes many of the doctrines found in the works of al-Khaṣībī. In the *Umm al-Kitāb* Ibn Sabaʾ is associated with the fifth Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir instead of with ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. He is depicted as an aged scholar whose school the five-year-old al-Bāqir attends in order to learn his letters. However, when he displays his superior knowledge by interpreting the esoteric meanings of the alphabet and then manifests in five epiphanies as Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn, Ibn Sabaʾ becomes convinced of his divine nature.[64] The remainder of the story proceeds as usual: Ibn Sabaʾ publically declares the Imam's divinity, this time in the streets of Mecca, he is then denounced, burned to death, and finally resurrected before a select group of believers. In light of

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[63] This work is a Persian translation of a now lost Arabic text. Although it is attributed to the 2nd /8th century Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī, its inclusion of the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative indicates that it cannot be earlier than the 3rd /9th century, and is likely even later. (See S.W. Anthony, "The Legend of ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ and the Date of *Umm al-Kitāb*," *JRAS* 21(2011): 1-30.) The full Persian text of the *Umm al-Kitāb* was published in W. Ivanov, ed., "Ummu'l-Kitāb," *Der Islam* 23(1936). Translations into Italian, German, Arabic, and English can be found in: Pio Fillippani-Ronconi, *Ummuʾl-kitāb: introduzione, traduzione e note* (Napoli: Istituto universitario orientale di Napoli, 1966); Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis : die extreme Schia und die Alawiten* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1982), 113-98; Idem, *Al-Ghunūṣiyya fī-l-Islām*, trans. Rāʾid Bāsh and Sālimah Ṣāliḥ (Kūlūniyā: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2003), 90-138; A partial English translation based on Halm in Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, eds., *The Gnostic Bible* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 665-725; An English translation of the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative in Anthony, "The Legend of ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ," 19-30.

[64] These five characters are the *ahl al-kisāʾ*, the people of the cloak, revered by some *ghulāt* (known as the *mukhammisa*, the 'fivers') as different manifestations of the divinity.

al-Khaṣībī's portrayal of the Ibn Sabaʾ drama as something that recurs throughout history, this particular version can simply be understood as yet another instance of his resurrection, instead of as a contrary account.[65]

Defending this Interpretation against Critics

It is important to remember that not all of the Shiites who affirmed ʿAlī's divinity accepted this interpretation of Ibn Sabaʾ's actions. Some considered his declaration to have been a grave crime, deserving of death.[66] Evidence of the struggle to combat this position survives in the *K. Majmūʿ al-Akhbar*, a collection of early Nuṣayrī *ḥadīths*.[67] The chain of transmission provided for this polemic includes some of the most important names in Nuṣayrī sacred history, and it is obvious that whoever composed the story sought to give it considerable clout.

Set in the days after Ibn Sabaʾ's execution, the story is narrated by one *ghālī*, a certain Samīʿa b. al-Jarrāḥ, who originally condemned Ibn Sabaʾ's actions but was later put in his place. Samīʿa explains that when he heard rumors that Ibn Sabaʾ had been seen walking in the streets and marketplaces, he sought to find him in order to determine the truth of these claims. However,

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[65] If we were to list these appearances chronologically, the *Umm al-Kitāb*'s version should come before the *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*'s Madāʾin account. The *UK* story is set when al-Bāqir is five, i.e. in 62/682, while the *RR* account is set in 65/685. Of course, there is no indication that these stories should be read as a running narrative, only that they are different instances of Ibn Sabaʾ's execution and resurrection.

[66] Amir-Moezzi has argued in several instances that the Imam's disavowal and punishment of the *ghulāt* was not for their false belief but rather for their lack of discretion. (See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: the Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 129-31; Idem, "Knowledge is Power: Interpretations and Implications of the Miracle in Early Imamism," in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (2011), 216-19.) He cites the *ḥadīth* attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣadiq, "I sometimes teach a tradition to someone, and then he leaves me and reports the tradition exactly as he heard it from my mouth; because of this, I declare that it is licit to condemn and to hate him" (al-Nuʿmānī *K al-ghayba*, ch 1, p. 57 num 7). See also Hussein Modarressi, *Crisis and consolidation in the formative period of Shiʿite Islam : Abū Jaʿfar ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his contribution to imāmite Shīʿite thought* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993), 21.

[67] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*, ed. Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 8 (*Majmūʿat al-Aḥādīth al-ʿAlawiyya*) (Diyār ʿAql, Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 2008), 61-3.

although he was able to spot him, every time he tried to approach, Ibn Sabaʾ either disappeared or was miraculously transported out of his reach. Praying to God for assistance, Samīʿa eventually closed the distance between them and in exasperation asked, "O master, haven't you noticed who has been trying to reach you?" Knowing that Samīʿa wanted to find out why he had been resurrected, Ibn Sabaʾ responded, "Is what happened to me not sufficient for you, O Samīʿa?" To which he replied, "O master, but did you not reveal the secret of God?" In other words, did you not commit the greatest most unpardonable sin of those entrusted the secret of ʿAlī's divinity? To this Ibn Sabaʾ replied, "Are you better acquainted with the *mawlā* than me? By His command did I speak, by His desire did I publically declare, for Him with His permission did I propagandize (*bi-amrihi naṭaqtu, wa-bi-irādatihi nādaytu, wa-ilayhi bi-idhnihi daʿawtu*)."[68]

After convincing Samīʿa of his error, Ibn Sabaʾ turns to the *qibla* and with a hand extended, recites a long prayer asking for patience in his dealings with the unbelievers.[69] Several elements of this prayer deserve specific mention. First of all, the prayer is a *talbiya*, i.e. it includes the expression *labbayka,* I am at your service. In the *ghulāt* tradition the *talbiya* was particularly associated with Ibn Sabaʾ. It is also the prayer that Ibn Sabaʾ recites in the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* (Seven Chapters of Bābā Sayyednā, i.e. Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāh) composed in 597/1200, which also tells the tale of Ibn Sabaʾ's execution and resurrection. [70]

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[68] Ibid., 61.

[69] Ibid., 62-3.

[70] "Haft-babi Baba Sayyid-na," in *Two Early Ismaili Treatises*, ed. W. Ivanow (Bombay: A. A. A. Fyzee, 1933), 14-15. The story preserved in this work reads: "… And another point, ʿAbd Allāh-i Sabaʾ's crying *Labbayka* at the divinity of Mawlā-nā ʿAlī (bless him): it is well known that Mawlā-nā ʿAlī ordered fire brought, and ordered them, 'Stop saying this or I shall have you all burned.' They said, 'what would be more desirable than that, for you are our whole essence. This duality which is a veil between us will become one; for you have been all, and you will be. Have [us] burned.' Then he ordered that fire be rubbed in their faces, till relatively to the eyes of the people they burned; then on another day they were seen in the bazaar of Baṣra buying bread. They underwent this affair in the service of Mawlā-nā…" (This translation of the Persian text is copied from Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "The Popular Appeal of the Qiyāma: Translation

Second, the prayer alludes to elements of the Ibn Sabaʾ story otherwise only found in disparate sources. It mentions the manifold nature of his execution, which forms the core of al-Khaṣībī's story, and the various epiphanies through which the Imam revealed his true nature, featured in the *Umm al-Kitāb.* Ibn Sabaʾ says, "You killed me several times and you examined me through tests, but your unity is firmly established in my bosom. How could it not be firmly established in me when you revealed your manifestations to me and [showed me] that which you concealed from others?"[71] The unification of these motifs suggests that the two traditions may not be as distinct as they seem. It is possible that the school narrative in which the Imam discloses his divinity by appearing before Ibn Sabaʾ in various forms was more commonly attested than is evidenced by the surviving literature. The existence of a tradition that unites these two motifs may also bolster the proposition advanced above that the *Umm al-Kitāb* version is just another instance of Ibn Sabaʾ's appearance instead of a rival tradition.

Finally, this prayer describes Ibn Sabaʾ's execution as a docetic martyrdom instead of as a death and resurrection. Most of the other traditions discussed in this survey emphasize that his was an actual death. They make sure to mention that he was cremated, his ashes scattered in the wind, or that he was buried and prayed over. In the narrative sense these details serve to show ʿAlī's ostensible non-complicity, but also to accentuate the miraculous nature of Ibn Sabaʾ's resurrection. He *really* had been killed, but was then brought back to life. However, according to this prayer the flames never harmed him. Ibn Sabaʾ explains, "People think, with my being burned in the fire and not having seen the paths [created in the fire], that the fire burned me and

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of the *Haft Bāb-i Bābā Sayyid-nā* and Commentary Thereon " in *The Order of the Assassins: The Struggle of the Nīzārī Ismāʿīlīs against the Islamic World* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1955), 294-5.)

[71] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 62.

tormented my body, but in fact it separated from me to the right and to the left."[72] This alternate understanding is also attested to by al-Maqdīsī who reported that the *ghulāt* claimed that the fire did not harm Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers, "rather it became cold and safe for them as it had for Ibrāhīm."[73]

Although it is difficult to determine exactly when this story was written, its *isnād* points to the context in which it was understood. Chains of transmission are generally not as significant in Nuṣayrī literature as they are in mainstream Imāmī texts. But this *ḥadīth* is narrated with a very long *isnād* populated by a veritable litany of *ghulāt* transmitters. It reads:[74]

> [14] Al-Qāsim ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī [found in a book on the authority of] [13] Abū al-Tayyib Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jāmiʿī -- [12] Abū al-Qāsim Ḥamza b. Muḥammad al-Ṣūfī – [11] Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Shāshī [al-Thulthī] – [10] al-Ḥasan b. Razīn– [9] Muḥammad b. Ṣadaqa[75] – [8] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal[76]—[7] His father, Muḥammad[77] – [6] his grandfather al-Mufaḍḍal[78] -- [5] Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī[79] – [4] Yaḥyā b. Umm al-Ṭawīl al-Thumālī[80] — [3] Abū Khālid ʿAbd Allāh b. Ghālib al-Kābulī[81] — [2] Rushayd al-Hajarī[82] – [1] Samīʿa b. al-Jarrāḥ.

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[72] Ibid.

[73] al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Badʾ wal-taʾrīkh*: V, 125. The Quranic version of Ibrāhīm and the fire can be found in Q21: 69.

[74] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 61. I have not been able to identify the later transmitters, but if the chain prior to transmitter thirteen is indeed complete, it was probably written down in the 4th – 5th/10th – 11th centuries. Note that it includes three generations of Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar's family.

[75] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Āl Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (Najaf 1961), 391.

[76] Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar's grandson, see al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿalawī 4 (*Majmūʿat al-Harrāniyīn 1: al-muʾallafāt al-khāṣṣa*) (Diyār ʿAql, Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 2006), 117,19,36,42. I would like to credit Mushegh Asatryan for this reference.

[77] The printed text includes a typo and reads al-Mufaḍḍal instead of Muḥammad. He is Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar's son and *bāb* 9 of the Nuṣayrī religion. See fn 108.

[78] *Bāb* 8, see fn 107.

[79] *Bāb* 6, see fn 105.

[80] *Bāb* 5, see fn 104.

The length of this *isnād* and the prestige of the men included add authority to the polemical objective of the *ḥadīth.* But it also points to a broader theological assumption about Ibn Sabaʾ's actions in the larger schema of Nuṣayrī educational theology.

Several of the transmitters of this *ḥadīth* (nos. 2-7) are considered to have been manifestations of the *bāb*, the third and lowest aspect of the Nuṣayrī trinity. This trinity is comprised of an abstract god called the *maʿnā* (essence), a concealing god called the *ism* (name) or *ḥijāb* (veil), and a revealing god called the *bāb* (door). These three aspects of the godhead repeatedly manifest in human form in order to allow humanity the opportunity to attain gnosis of the divine.[83] While the *ḥijāb* works to conceal the *maʿnā* from those who are not worthy, the *bāb*

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[81] *Bāb* 4, see fn 103.

[82] *Bāb* 3, see fn 102.

[83] The Nuṣayrī theology of divine manifestation is inextricably intertwined with their theology of education. God appears in human form in order to educate humanity. According to an oft-repeated saying, "a being can only understand that which is in his form and of his type." Therefore, in the primordial world of light, god appeared to the souls of the believers in a body of light in order to teach them how to worship him (al-Mufaḍḍal Ibn 'Umar al-Juʿfī, *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-'Aẓillat*, ed. Aref Tamer, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970), 38.) The same is true in the material world, where he appears in human form as a mercy to humanity in order to continue his instruction. (See al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 3.) However, the very form that makes God comprehensible to the believers also makes it impossible for them to recognize him as their Lord without specific instruction. This was already established in the primordial world, when God tested the believers by appearing in three successive forms as a young child, as an old man, and as a powerful man with a mustache riding on a lion. At each manifestation God asked them to identify Him and they couldn't. They thought he was just like them. (In some versions they do recognize him despite his form.) Likewise, when God appears on earth, humanity must be directed to Him. However this must be done in a covert fashion, because not everyone is worthy of receiving the truth. Hence the tri-partite manifestation: The *maʿnā*, the true essence of God, manifests itself in someone with a low profile to hide his identity from the masses. The *ism/ḥijāb* appears in someone with a high profile in order to distract the unworthy from seeing the true nature of the *maʿnā*. The *bāb* is sent as a concession to humanity. His role is to announce the divinity of *maʿnā* and thereby act as the passageway by which the worthy can access the divine.

For the story of God's education in his triple appearance see *K. al-Usūs* in *MS Arabe 1449*, (Paris Bibliothèque Nationale), 8b; Ja'far al-Kanj Dandashī, *Madkhal ilā al-madhhab al-'alawī al-nuṣayrī* (Irbid: al-Rūznā, 2000), 80. Also quoted in al-Jillī, *R. al-Andiya*: 328; Idem, *Kitāb Ḥāwī al-asrār*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 2 (*Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya*) (Diyār 'Aql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifa, 2006), 159; Idem, *Risālat al-Fatq wa-al-ratq*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 2 (*Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya*) (Diyār 'Aql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifa, 2006), 318; Abū Sa'īd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Dalā'il fī al-Masā'il*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 3 (*Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya*) (Diyār 'Aql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifah, 2006), 131; al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 34; Muḥammad ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿalamayn*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī 4 (*Majmūʿat al-Harrāniyīn 1: al-Muʾallafāt al-Khāṣṣa)* (Diyār ʿAql, Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 2006), 328; al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 60; *MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564*: 12-13. The *K. al-usūs* was studied in Meir Bar-Asher and

strives to reveal his identity to those who are. In the first Islamic cycle these roles were occupied by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh, and Salmān al-Fārisī respectively, but this triad continued to appear for the next eleven generations in the form of the Imams and their loyal companions. The names found in the above *isnād* are exactly those identified by Nuṣayrīs as manifestations of the *bāb*.

It is clear that whoever constructed the chain of transmission sought to connect Ibn Sabaʾ with the institution of the *bāb*, the aspect of the trinity charged with revealing the secret. One name is conspicuously absent from this list, namely, that of the seventh *bāb*, Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab, more commonly known as Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. (The *isnād* runs through the names of *bābs* 3-9 but excludes his.) Since this is the only surviving version of the *ḥadīth* we know about it is difficult to speculate whether he was intentionally or mistakenly excluded. But his absence is particularly striking when one considers how closely the stories surrounding his life echo those told about Ibn Sabaʾ.

Abū al-Khaṭṭāb in Imāmī and Nuṣayrī Sources

Unlike the semi-fictional Ibn Sabaʾ, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was an actual historical figure. He was the chief *dāʿī* of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in Kufa, which would have made him the most influential Imāmī propagandist of his time. His traditions, those ostensibly transmitted before his deviation from Imāmī doctrine, can still be found in the mainstream Imāmī *ḥadīth* collections. However, around the year 135/752 he began propagating revolutionary *ghulāt* beliefs in the name of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Recognizing the danger in his actions, al-Ṣādiq publically cursed him and dissociated

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Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43-74. This book is actually much earlier than the 13th century *terminus ante quem* Bar-Asher and Kofsky provide for it. As seen in this list, it is already quoted in several of al-Jillī's works written in the late 10th c.

from his mission.[84] This did not deter the outspoken *ghālī.* In 138/755 Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and seventy of his followers assembled in the mosque of Kufa, probably for revolutionary purposes, and there they were attacked by troops of the Abbasid governor ʿIsā b. Mūsā. All were killed except for Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, who was taken alive and beheaded. His body and those of his followers were hung on crosses and later burned. Their heads were then sent to the Caliph al-Manṣūr to be displayed on the city walls of Baghdad as a warning to other Shiite revolutionaries.[85]

From the plethora of *ḥadīth*s reported about this man, it is obvious that his disavowal and execution were extremely traumatic for the Imāmī community. [86] There were those who did not accept the sincerity of al-Ṣādiq's curse and who refused to dissociate from his mission. The heresiographers write about a number of Khaṭṭābī sects that continued to operate after his death.

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[84] It is not surprising that al-Ṣādiq would have been so alarmed by Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's actions. The Abbasids had only just achieved power in 132/750 by claiming to be "the one agreed upon (*al-riḍā*) from the House of Muḥammad" and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's agitation in the name of a well-respected ʿAlid would have been perceived as a serious threat to their legitimacy. Moreover, the empire was then wracked by revolutions of men espousing extravagant views about their leaders (for example, the Muslimiyya in Khurāsān and the Rāwandiyya in Iraq), and the Abbasid regime would have been hyper-vigilant for any *ghulāt* threats. It was therefore extremely important for al-Ṣādiq to publically renounce his claim to rule and dissociate from the extravagant speculations about his nature by cursing Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. (For more about the revolts of the Muslimiyya and Rawāndiyya see Crone, *Nativist Prophets*: 88-9.)

[85] The main heresiographical entries on Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and his followers can be found in al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*: 63-6; al-Qummī, *K. al-Maqālāt*: 50-5; Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-islāmīyīn wa-ʾkhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Helmut Ritter, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980), 10-13; Halkin, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*: 62-6. (Badr's Arabic edition of al-Baghdādī is missing the entry on Abū al-Khaṭṭāb) ; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. ʿAbd al-Lāṭīf Muḥammad al-ʿAbd, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣrīya, 1977), 185-7. Some secondary discussions of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb can be found in Halm, *Al-Ghunūṣiyya fī-l-Islām*: 139-44; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismaʿīlīs: their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 88-9; Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, "Dogma and ritual in 'Kitāb al-Maʿārif' by the Nuṣayrī theologian Abū Saʿīd Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī," *Arabica* 52, no. 1 (2005): 52; Hassan Ansari, "Abū al-Khaṭṭāb," in *Encyclopedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary (Brill, 2011).

[86] See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 224-6, 228, 290-308, 324, 344, 352-3, 370, 482-3, 528-9 (In this one, those who doubt that the sincerity of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's repudiation are cursed as well.), 71; Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-ʿUsūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, 4 vols. (Teheran: Maktabat al-Ṣadūq, 1381/1961), II: 42-43.

[87] As the ideological descendants of these groups, the Nuṣayrīs insist that al-Ṣādiq's curse was merely *taqiyya*.[88] They claim that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's proclamation, described as an *adhān* from the minaret of the mosque of Kufa, was undertaken at the Imam's command in order to "strengthen the people of truth and weaken the people of falsehood and doubts,"[89] and that he was rewarded for his declaration by being elevated to the highest rank of the *bāb*s.[90]

As with the execution of ʿAbdallāh b. Sabaʾ, the heresiographers report that some sympathizers denied the deaths of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and his followers. They claimed that Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq warned them of the attack and that they managed to escape the mosque before the troops arrived. In the confusion of the battle the ʿAbbasid soldiers killed their own comrades-in-arms, and these were the men who were beheaded and crucified, while Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and his followers rose unharmed to heaven.[91]

These types of stories are told by the Nuṣayrīs as well. One is so exceptional in its length and detail that it deserves to be relayed here. Its *isnād* runs through al-Ṭabarānī, al-Jillī, and al-

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[87] It should be pointed out here that the heresiographical taxonomy of sects emerging from the Khaṭṭābiyya does not account for the development of the Nuṣayriyya. The heresiographers write that after Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's execution his followers split into the Bazīghiyya, Sariyya, Maʿmariyya, ʿUmayriyya, and Mufaḍḍaliyya, after the names of their respective leaders. The Mufaḍḍaliyya, the followers of al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, are said to have denounced Abū al-Khaṭṭāb once al-Ṣādiq cursed him. The Nuṣayrīs, however, revere both al-Mufaḍḍal and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, which somewhat complicates the heresiological genealogy.

[88] For example, al-Khaṣībī writes, "Had you known the true intention behind the cursing of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, you would have stopped speaking ill of him" (al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 27.) Nuṣayrī discussions of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb can be found in al-Juʿfī, *K. al-Haft*; Muḥammad Ibn Nuṣayr, *Kitāb al-Akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-nūrāniyya*, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī I (Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya) (Diyār ʿAql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifa), 125-6; al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 73; Idem, *Fiqh al-Risāla*: 90; Idem, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā: al-qism al-thānī: al-abwāb*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 7 (Diyār ʿAql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifa, 2007), 369-74. (This is a portion of the Hidāya al-Kubrā that is not published in the Beirut 1986 edition.) ; al-Jillī, *K. Bāṭin al-Ṣallāt*: 232; Idem, *R. al-Andiya*: 323, 30-1; al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 56; al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Risāla al-Jawhariyya*: 29; *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 141-3.

[89] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 73-4.

[90] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 56.

[91] al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*: 92. Note that similar stories were told about Abū Muslim, executed the previous year in 137/755. See ibid., 67.

Khaṣībī, the three founding figures of the Nuṣayrī religion, and it is a dialogue between a certain Ṣāliḥ b. Hilāl al-Kūfī and a woman named Umm Nahār al-ʿAbdiyya who witnessed the execution of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb.[92] Ṣāliḥ reports that he heard Umm Nahār say:[93]

> Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was killed near my home, just below my house. It was a dark night. I could not sleep at all out of pity and sympathy for him until the early morning so I went up to the roof of my house. I said to myself that this matter is incomprehensible [in its tragedy]. I had not finished my thought when I saw Abū al-Khaṭṭāb sitting upright, wiping his face with the corner of his shirt. He said, "for he to whom God gives no light, no light whatever has he," (Q24: 40) and he beckoned with his hand towards his companions and they stood around him like the rising full moon and he started reciting a poem:
>
> > Rise up sons of truth to your truth!
> > The dawn among the dawns glows red!
> > Rise to the truth that will give you life!
> > The intention is the intended hour!
> > Return to your humanity quickly!
> > For the graceful return to graceful states!
>
> She said: By God's truth he had just finished his poem when I saw the earth shake and the air split by two blazes of light, and above, a retinue gleaming like lights. At its head was a young man riding the disk of the sun[94] and he was singing these verses:
>
> > *labbayka* (at your service!) oh Truth! To His Truth
> > the servant desires to be united.
> > The victory of God has reached you. O Victory,
> > have pity, for you are the extended shadow.
> > O most praiseworthy of the time! To praise Him
> > you exist in the days.
>
> He then turned to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and seated him behind him. Then he left and I couldn't hear anything but a buzzing in the air and a clamor in the clouds of the

[92] It is significant that this story originates with a woman. Nuṣayrīs, and particularly the shaykhs mentioned in this *isnād*, generally claim that women have no capacity for religious comprehension, so it is quite surprising that they attribute this important story to one. On the Nuṣayrī conception of female religiosity see Chapter Two.

[93] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 141-3.

[94] This apparition is likely ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, who is associated with the sun. See al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 37-8; *MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564*: 55. In this latter reference there is an illustration of ʿAlī's face in the sun disk, with the rays appearing like the mane of a lion, the animal he is always associated with.

> sky.[95] It was as though what had transpired never happened, and as though the story never occurred.

Like Samīʿa b. al-Jarrāḥ in the Ibn Sabaʾ story, Umm Nahār claims to be an eyewitness to the resurrected *ghālī* and his followers. She describes their return to life and their ascent to heaven behind ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the hypostatized *maʿnā* in his full glory, riding the sun-disc and accompanied by flashes of lightening and the booming sound of thunder. Her detailed and descriptive account reveals the deep emotional significance of this affair for the Khaṭṭābiyya. But how did she deal with the historical reality of the execution and crucifixion? Her solution is similar to that described by the heresiographers: she disowns the bodies (or in this case, the body) of the dead. She says:

> In the morning the authorities arrived with wooden stakes to crucify them but they only found one man, whom they crucified and left… I knew one of his [Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's?] men so I hid behind the door hinge and called him by name saying, "Do you know this man that was left behind from among them?" He said, "yes my lady, he wasn't one of them, he was only with them by accident."

The crucifixion and public display of the bodies of the Khaṭṭābiyya could not be denied, so instead Umm Nahār limits it to one man, who was never really one of them, but had merely been killed in the fray.[96]

Umm Nahār's story does not end there. She also relates what she claims to be a verbatim account of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's proclamation of al-Ṣādiq's divinity that had set off the entire affair. As mentioned above, this was thought to have taken the form of an *adhān* from the minaret of

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[95] This is an allusion to the belief that the thunder is ʿAlī's voice in the heavens. (See for example al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*: 180.)

[96] This aspect of the story may also be a response to an Imāmī account (preserved in al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*: 91; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 352-3.) in which only one repentant man survives the massacre. He is identified as Abū Khadīja, Sālim b. Makram al-Jammāl (the camel driver), a Khaṭṭābī who, after being wounded, hid among the dead bodies in the mosque of Kufa until nightfall when he escaped, repented, and eventually became a faithful transmitter of Imāmī *ḥadīth*. If this story is about the survival of one good Imāmī, Umm Nahār's account is about the death of one non-Khaṭṭābī.

the mosque of Kufa. Following this tradition, her account is structured as a traditional Shiite call to prayer, given in this instance with its *bāṭinī* (esoteric) interpretation. In the translation that follows, the original words of the *adhān* are italicized while Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's supposed additions are left plain:

> *God is most great*! God is greater than what is imagined in the innermost thoughts.
> *God is most great!* God is greater than the subtlest of secrets.
> *I testify that* the One is the Prince of the Bees, who returns from the eternal concealment. "He has no end," (Q112: 4) and "He has no equal." (paraphrase of Q112: 4).
> *I testify that* the one who proceeds from Him is an apostle, and he is proof of Him. He is not detached from Him so that he is a second alongside Him. He is not separate from Him so that he becomes distinct from Him. Rather he is His greatest attribute and greatest verse.
> *Come to prayer* (*ḥayya ʿalā al-ṣalāt*), which is knowledge of Him and the path of His existence. He forbids you upon [this path] if you act with abomination, wickedness, rejection, disavowal, and with the filth of this abode.
> *Come to success* (*ḥayya ʿalā al-falāḥ*), which is knowledge of that which enlightens the hearts and illuminates the essences, namely knowledge of the great *ism* [Muḥammad],[97] who informed humanity of what it did not know when the sinful man [Abū Bakr] overstepped out of jealousy and outrage against Him.
> *Come to the best of work* (*ḥayya ʿalā khayr al-ʿamal*), to certainty from error and protection from fear. For it is good and better preserving for whoever wants to remember or is afraid. Prayer rises up in the minds of those worthy of it and affirms the proof for those who say it. Rise to the knowledge of God and the family of the house of Muḥammad, for they are the kinsfolk (*al-qurbā*) to whoever approaches and the proofs to whoever seeks. "Follow those who ask no reward of you, and themselves are rightly guided!" (Q36: 21)
> *God is most great* in the hearts of the gnostics.
> *I testify that there is no God* except for my master the Prince of the Bees, so why do they lie? God, the six directions are yours wherever you face. And your mercy surrounds me and your kindness to me is abundant. There is no deity other than you, creator of the worlds.

Clever though it is, Umm Nahār's account is unlikely to represent Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's actual words. It doesn't mention Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq at all, and focuses instead on ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib,

[97] This is a reference to the doctrine of *siyāqa*, according to which the *ism* appears in the form of the *bāb* to announce the Imam's divinity, which will be explained in what follows.

characteristically referred to as the 'Prince of Bees.'[98] It also incorporates complex elements of Nuṣayrī theology (such as the relationship between the *maʿnā* and the *ism*) that are unlikely to have been included in a public speech made for proselytization.[99]

Establishing an Archetype for the Nuṣayrī *Bāb*

Unique in several respects, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's story is nonetheless similar to that of ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ. Both men are described as intimates of their respective Imams who were instructed to reveal the secret of their divinity, and who, when they did so, were denounced, executed, and finally resurrected in affirmation of their claims. In fact, this same pattern recurs in most accounts of the *bāb*s of the Nuṣayrī religion. The following is the list of the historical manifestations of the Nuṣayrī *bāb*s:[100]

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[98] The believers are the bees and ʿAlī is their prince (and by extension, honey is esoteric knowledge). See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 124-6. One explanation for this analogy that is particularly relevant for our context is the bees' willingness to sacrifice themselves for their queen. Thus ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb are like bees that sacrifice themselves for ʿAlī. Although this title is particularly important for the Nuṣayrīs, it can also be found in mainstream Imāmī texts. See I. Goldziher, "Schiʿitisches," *ZDMG* 44(1910): 532-3; Kohlberg, "Taqiyya in Shīʿī Theology and Religion," 358-9, fn 74.

[99] More probable versions that do mention Jaʿfar can be found in Ibn Nuṣayr, *K. al-akwār*: 126; al-Jillī, *R. al-Andiya*: 330-1. The one attributed to Ibn Nuṣayr is particularly interesting. It has Abū al-Khaṭṭāb announce: "Fellow creatures: close angels, prophets, apostles, mankind, Jinn, vermin, crawling things, and everything that has a sensory and speaking spirit, I am Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh the apostle of God sent to you at the first and the last, exoterically and esoterically. I convey to you the message of your Lord and exhort you that indeed your Lord and Creator is visible amongst you. He comes in your midst, strolls in your marketplaces, settles in your lands, sits in your assemblies, addresses you through public sermons, and answers your questions. There is no veil concealing Him from your view, and nothing hiding Him from your regard. He commanded me and I spoke. He sent me and I transmitted. Verily, I mean Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad. He is your Lord, the Eternal, the Antecedent before the First was set forth. He is the goal of every seeker and the hope of every dreamer. Indeed He is ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib." Depending on the actual date of this *ḥadīth* the fact that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb identifies himself as a manifestation of Muḥammad (and not Salmān) is either an example of the doctrine of *siyāqat al-bāb* described below (according to which the *ism* appears in the *bāb* when making his pronouncement) or a remnant of the older system in which only ʿAlī and Mūhammad belonged in the Godhead, and all these men who made their declarations were really manifestations of the *ism.*

[100] This list can be found in many places but one of the earliest is al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 56, 70-1. There are also alternate lists of *bāb*s according to the Isḥāqīs and Mukhamissa preserved in al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 58.

1. Salmān al-Fārisī[101]
2. Qays b. Waraqa[102]
3. Rushayd al-Hajarī[103]
4. Kankar Abū Khālid al-Kābulī[104]
5. Yaḥyā b. Maʿmar ibn Umm Ṭawīl al-Thumālī[105]
6. Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī[106] (d. 128 AH)
7. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab[107] (d. 138 AH)
8. Al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī[108] (d. prior to 179 AH)
9. Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal[109]
10. ʿUmar b. al-Furāt[110] (d. 203 AH)
11. Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr[111] (d. after 260 AH)

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[101] al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 338-44.

[102] Ibid., 345-8.

[103] He was tortured and executed by the Umayyad governer ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād. See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 75-8. Also discussed in al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 349-52.

[104] He used to be a follower of Ibn al-Hanafiyya but consequently switched allegiance to ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. According to (ps.-) Nāshiʾ he introduced the idea that a child can be imam, in other words, that his knowledge is innate and not learned, citing the examples of Jesus and John the Baptist who were prophets even as children. (Nāshiʾ, *Masāʾil al-imāma*: 25.) He was persecuted by the Umayyad governer of Iraq al-Hajjāj (d.95/714) but managed to hide in a cave and escape with his life. See al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 353-5; L. Capezzone, "Abiura dalla Kaysāniyya e conversione all'Imāmiyya: il caso di Abū Khālid al-Kābulī," *RSO* 66, no. 1-2 (1992): 1-14; Maryam Sadeghi, "Abū Khālid al-Kābulī," in *Encyclopedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary (2012).

[105]He was tortured and executed by al-Ḥajjāj. See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 123-4; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 356-63.

[106] He was once an associate of the *ghalī* al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd. He is accused of fabricating *ḥadīth*s to support his exaggerated vision of the imam's power. See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 191-8; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 364-8; Halm, *Al-Ghunūṣiyya fī-l-Islām*: 69-80; Hussein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: a Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 86-103.

[107] See fn 84, 85, and 87 above.

[108] He is considered the leader of the Mufawiḍḍa. See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 321-9 (particularly entry 587, in which he is cursed) ; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 375-8; Heinz Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten'. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ġulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairiertums," *Islam*, no. 55 (1978): 225; Idem, *Al-Ghunūṣiyya fī-l-Islām*: 149-50; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 1: 333-7; Mushegh Asatryan, "Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: The Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-Tradition" (Yale University, 2012), 47-56.

[109] al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 379-80.

[110] He was a disciple of al-Ridā from the well-known Shiite Banū al-Furāt financiering family. He was executed in Baghdad in 203/818-19 on the orders of Ibrāhīm al-Mahdī. See L. Massignon, "Les Origines shiʿites de la famille vizirale des Banuʾl Furat," in *Opera Minora* (1935); D. Sourdel, "Ibn al-Furāt," in *EI2*. He is cursed inal-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 554. (but under the incorrect name Muḥammad b. al-Furāt) See also al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 381-3.

[111] The eponym of the Nuṣayrī religion. He is cursed in al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 520-1; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*: XXV: 285, 318 and LI: 367. Heresiographical reports about him can be found in al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*: 102-3; al-Qummī, *K. al-Maqālāt*: 100-1. A Nuṣayrī account can be found in al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 384-91.

12. Unnamed, in occultation.

There is evidence that almost every man on this list proclaimed extravagant views about the Imams and was executed and/or cursed as a result.[112] The *bābs* we hear most about are 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11, but we can assume that the others somehow fit this schema as well.[113] To explicate just a few, we can look at the example of Rushayd al-Hajarī, the great Shiite martyr who was gruesomely executed by the Umayyad governor ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād for refusing to renounce his loyalty to ʿAlī.[114] The Imāmī authors who sanctify him do not often remember that Rushayd was also a vociferous proponent of *ghulāt* beliefs. The heresiographer Pseudo Nāshiʾ (Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb) describes him as a member of the Sabaʾiyya who publically denied ʿAlī's death, insisting that he is the Mahdī who "will fill the earth with justice and equity."[115] Yaḥyā b. Maʿmar b. Umm al-Ṭawīl al-Thumālī and ʿUmar b. al-Furāt were likewise executed for professing Shiite beliefs.[116] But al-Jillī, the disciple and successor of al-Khaṣībī, assures us that, like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, these *bāb*s were never really killed. He writes: [117]

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[112] The obvious question here is why some of the extremely important Kufan *ghulāt* whose life stories conform exactly to this schema are excluded from the list of Nuṣayrī *bāb*s. I refer specifically to al-Mukhtar al-Thaqafī, Bayān b. Samʿān, al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd, and Abū Manṣūr al-ʿIjlī, each of which preached *ghulāt* doctrines and was executed and/or cursed as a result. These men are extremely important in the Imāmī heresiographical tradition but hardly feature in Nuṣayrī thought. One answer might be that although their doctrines clearly informed Nuṣayrī theology, these men were not, strictly speaking, Imāmīs. Al-Mukhtar and Bayān were Hanafī Shiites and advocated for Muḥammad b. al-Hanafiyya and his son Abū Hashim, respectively. Al-Mughīra and Abū Manṣūr both began as advocates of the fifth imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, but then transferred their allegiance to the Ḥasanid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh *al-Nafs al-Zakiyya* (the Pure Soul). As strict Ḥuṣaynids, the Nuṣayrīs would not have celebrated these men, despite their debt to their teachings. (For the careers of these men see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 520-1; al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 384-91.)

[113] al-Jillī, *Bāṭin al-Ṣallāt,* 232-3.

[114] See fn 102 above.

[115] Ps- Nāshiʾ, *Masāʾil al-imāma*: 23.

[116] See fn 104 and 109 above.

[117] al-Jillī, *K. Bāṭin al-Ṣallāt*: 257.

> …The manifold executions of the *sīn*[118] among whom is Rushayd al-Hajarī, whom ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād killed… and among whom is also Yahyā b Maʿmar, whom al-Ḥajjāj killed… and among whom is Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, whom ʿĪsa b. Mūsā killed.... All this was an eclipse of the truth and a refutation in the exoteric. But according to the esoteric there is no truth in it, rather it is an illusion and a trick of the eyes.

As for those *bāb*s who were not killed but were instead publically cursed by the Imams, including Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī, al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar, and Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, we are assured that their denunciations were merely for show, done "to appease the exoteric people, the people of unbelief, obstinacy, limitation, and apostasy."[119] But in reality all of these men were sent by their Imams to profess the truth.

This reality puts into perspective the astonishing Nuṣayrī *ḥadīth* according to which, when al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar asked Muḥammad al-Bāqir, "from whom shall I take the particulars of my religion?" al-Bāqir replied, "look to the man whom the masses have charged with *zandaqa* (dualist heresy), and the *muqaṣṣira* (those who fall short) have dissociated from, and the *mufawwiḍa* (those who attribute supernatural powers to the Imams)[120] have accused of ignorance, and take your religion from him."[121] Indeed, the charges of heresy, the dissociation,

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[118] The *sīn* is another way of saying the *bāb* who is the manifestation of Salmān (the *sīn*).

[119] Idem, *R. al-Andiya*: 331.

[120] The Nuṣayrīs generally fall under the designation *mufawwiḍa*. In this instance it seems that the *mufawwiḍa* are perceived as a more moderate group that does not go far enough in their estimation of the Imams. This usage would support Modarressi's thesis that the *mufawwiḍa* are to be distinguished from the more extreme *ghulāt* (whom he calls *ṭayyāra*), who deified the Imams. See Modarressi, *Crisis and consolidation*: 20-1; Asatryan, "Heresy and Rationalism," 19-20.

[121] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 164. A similar *ḥadīth* is recorded in al-Ṭabarānī's *K. al-Maʿārif*. This time the discussion is between al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī and a certain *ghālī* named ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasān who asks, "From whom should I learn the particulars of my religion, for there are many opinions?" Al-ʿAskarī answers: "From him whom the *nāṣiba* (enemies of the Shiites) have accused of *rafḍ* (denying the legitimacy of the first three caliphs), and the *muqaṣṣira* (those who fall short) have accused of *ghuluww*; from him whom the *murtafiʿa* (those who exceedingly exalt [the Imams] = the *mufawwiḍa*) envy, denouncing him as heretic. Seek him and you shall find from him the particulars of your religion." ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasān replies that the only man he knows by this description is Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, and so he follows him. This story is quoted in al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 384 fn1; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, "Dogma and ritual in 'Kitāb al-Maʿārif',": 53.

and the ridicule are the very markers of the *bāb*. Recognizing the truth of his mission despite these markers is the ultimate test of the true believer.

From these types of *ḥadīth*s, and from the Nuṣayris' self-conscious celebration of the notoriety of the *bāb*s, emerges an extremely surprising feature of Nuṣayrī identity. Although they clearly saw themselves as the true believers, Nuṣayrīs enthusiastically embraced their heretical reputation as a badge of honor. This is perhaps different from other sectarian groups who did not see themselves as heterodox, but were merely ascribed this derogatory description by their opponents. [122] In the esoteric worldview of the Nuṣayrīs, in which normative values are inverted and apparent realities are deceptive, the charges of heresy leveled against them by the Sunni and Shiite theologians epitomized their alienation from a sinful and disbelieving society. These charges also reinforced the exclusivity of their doctrines, which, by being ridiculed and denounced, were protected from the unworthy like treasure wrapped in filthy rags.

The Problem of Ibn Sabaʾ's Exclusion from the Ranks of *Bāb*

Returning to Samīʿa b. al-Jarrāḥ's story of Ibn Sabaʾ's resurrection, one can now understand why its *isnād* is populated by the *bāb*s of the Nuṣayrī religion. Their stories conform to his. Just as he sacrificed his reputation and his life in order to proclaim the divinity of his Imam, so did they. Just as he was resurrected and his reputation restored, so were theirs. This is the role of the *bāb*: to participate in the great deception that hides the truth from unbelievers while affirming it for those who know. In the *Umm al-Kitāb* this pattern is called the *madhhab*

[122] Jacques Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Doxa," *History of Religions* 40, no. 4 (2001): 327-51.

fidāʾī (doctrine of self-sacrifice), and it is Ibn Sabaʾ who is its archetype.[123] In the writings of the early Nuṣayrī theologians it is called *nidāʾ* (and sometimes *taṣrīḥ* or *iʿlān*, all of which mean 'public declaration'), and it is also always introduced with reference to Ibn Sabaʾ. The obvious question now is why Ibn Sabaʾ, the ultimate *bāb*, is not actually sanctified as one of the Nuṣayrī *bāb*s. This could be because ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ never existed. As shown above, his story is a literary construct that developed over time in response to different heresiographical agendas. It is likely that by the 3rd/9th century, in which the execution/resurrection motif emerged, the list of men sanctified by the proto-Nuṣayrīs was already fixed. Not able to include him in this rank, later Nuṣayrīs portrayed him as the master *najīb*, two levels down in the spiritual hierarchy.[124] However, Anthony has recently argued that the historical character behind the mythical Ibn Sabaʾ is actually Rushayd al-Hajarī.[125] If this is so, than Ibn Sabaʾ can be thought to have made it into the list of *bāb*s as well.

Another reason why Ibn Sabaʾ could not be considered the *bāb* of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is that this position was already occupied by Salmān al-Fārisī, the first Persian convert to Islam and staunch supporter of ʿAlī's successorship.[126] The idea that Salmān was the *bāb* of ʿAlī was too entrenched in Shiite thought to allow revision. From as early as the 2nd/8th century there were already groups, called the *sīniyya* by the heresiographers, who venerated Salmān together with

[123] "Ummu'l-Kitāb," 439-40.

[124] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 58; "Extracts from the Manual for Sheikhs," in *The Asian Mystery Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*, ed. Samual Lyde (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 255; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion*: 189.

[125] Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*: 213-25.

[126] On Salmān in Sunni and Shiite thought see L. Massignon, "Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien," in *Opera Minora* (Tours: Arrault et Cie., 1934), 443-83.

Muḥammad and ʿAlī.[127] Even among mainstream Sunnis and Shiites he was thought to hold a uniquely close position to the *ahl al-bayt* (with some canonical *ḥadīth* including him as an honorary member of this family).[128] But where is Salmān's *nidāʾ*? How does he fit into the schema of proclamation and docetic martyrdom? The answer is that he doesn't, so to fit him in, the doctrine of *siyāqat al-bāb* was developed.

The Doctrine of *Siyāqat al-Bāb*

The principal *nidāʾ* of Salmān's lifetime was that done by Muḥammad at Ghadīr Khumm. According to this story, when Muḥammad was returning from his final pilgrimage to Mecca he stopped at the pool of Khumm and announced to the Muslims assembled there, "whoever had me as his *mawlā*, ʿAlī is his *mawlā*" (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-ʿAlī mawlāhu*). Although both Sunnis and Shiites accept this story, they argue over its implications. Sunnis understand the term *mawlā* as 'friend' and therefore take Muḥammad's statement as an exhortation to treat ʿAlī with friendliness and respect, but no more. Shiites understand the word *mawlā* as master, and understand Muḥammad's declaration as an announcement of ʿAlī's political successorship.[129] The Nuṣayrīs take the events of Ghadīr Khumm a step further. By changing the final word of the

[127] ibid., 464-79.

[128] *Salmān minnā Ahl al-Bayt* (Salmān is one of us, of the family of the House [of the Prophet]), see Ibn Hishām (ed. Suhaili) II, 191, and al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 12.

[129] On the Sunni-Shiite debate over the events of Ghadīr Khumm see Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge Universit Press, 1997), 253; L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ghadīr Khumm," in *EI2*.

declaration from *mawlā* to *maʿnā* (so that it reads *man kuntu mawlāhū fa-ʿAlī maʿnāhu*), they understand Muḥammad's declaration to be a pronouncement of ʿAlī's divinity.[130]

However, according to the schema described above Muḥammad is the *ism/ḥijāb*, the concealing aspect of the godhead, so what is he doing making the most public proclamation of ʿAlī's divinity at Ghadīr Khumm? Al-Khaṣībī explains that Muḥammad made this declaration *through* Salmān, so that it was the *ism* speaking through the *bāb* who proclaimed the divinity of ʿAlī.[131] To maintain this pattern subsequent proclamations are described in this same way: when Abū al-Khaṭṭāb or Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr made their public declarations it was really the *ism* speaking through them.[132] This idea is explained as *siyāqat al-bāb*, the succession of the *bāb,* according to which the *ism* appears in the lower form of the deity in order to proclaim the truth. Perhaps this dual function is what is alluded to in the name of the *ism/hijab*: he is both the concealer of the *maʿnā* and the one who gives Him a name.

***Nidāʾ* and the *Khuṭba* Literature**

As mentioned above, the entire process we have described is given a technical designation in Nuṣayrī literature: It is called *nidāʾ*, meaning public declaration. Despite the

[130] This is explicitly stated by al-Ṭabarānī in the section of his *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād* dedicated to the *ʿīd yawm al-ghadīr.* See Rudolph Strothmann, "Festkalender der Nusairer," *Der Islam*, no. 27 (1944-1946): 55. For an analysis of al-Ṭabarānī's writings on the *yawm al-ghadīr* see Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion*: 120-28. See also Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Daylamī, *Hidayat al-mustarshid wa-sirāj al-muwaḥḥid*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 8 (Majmūʿat al-Aḥādīth al-ʿAlawīyya) (Diyār ʿAql: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 2008), 191-92.The Nuṣayrīs also have a tradition of Muḥmammad announcing ʿAlī's divinity prior to Ghadīr Khumm in the tent of Umm Salama before a more private audience of forty choice followers. They call this *bayʿat al-dār.* See ibid., 196-201.

[131] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 55. Also explained in al-Jillī, *K. Bāṭin al-Ṣallāt*: 232-3.This schema is not always borne out. There are many instances when it is simply the *ism* announcing the *maʿnā* and not the *ism* through the *bāb*. I believe that these are relics of a pre-*bāb* system, where there was only thought to be a *maʿnā* and *ism.* This idea is addressed briefly at the conclusion of this chapter but it is not yet fully understood and deserves to be studied in much greater depth.

[132] Idem, *R. al-Andiya*: 330.

accounts of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's *adhān* described above, *nidāʾ* was thought to have a very specific content. Al-Jillī (d.~399/1008), the student and successor of al-Khaṣībī in Syria who dedicated an epistle to this subject entitled *R. al-Andiya*, explained that when a *bāb* professed *nidāʾ* he would quote one of several theosophic *khuṭbas* (sermons) of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[133] These *khuṭbas* were distinct from those found in the *Nahj al-Balāgha* (Peak of Eloquence), and were taken from a secret pool known to the *bāb*s.

Both Sunnis and Shiites considered ʿAlī to have been a master orator. From a very early period they collected sermons attributed to him for emulation.[134] As can be expected the *ghulāt* attributed to ʿAlī their own versions of such sermons to support their unique vision of his identity. In this way an entire body of 'non-canonical' *khuṭba* literature emerged in which ʿAlī announces his own divinity. Amir-Moezzi has studied the survival and proliferation of these sermons in Imāmī circles,[135] but they have survived among the Nuṣayrīs as well.[136] Their titles and some of their content can be culled from the available Nuṣayrī sources. These include the *khuṭbat al-aqālīm* (the provinces), *khuṭbat al-bayān* (the declaration), *khuṭbat al-iftikhār* (the glory) *khuṭbat al-ṭatanjiyya* (the gulf), also called the *khuṭbat al-kāshifa* (the uncovering), *khuṭbat al-durra* (the pearl), and *khuṭbat al-fāḥiṣa* (the examination).[137] In all of these *khuṭba*s ʿAlī identifies himself with the Quranic names and attributes of God such as, "I am the first, I am

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[133] ibid., 321-33.

[134] Many of these were anthologized in the *Nahj al-Balāgha* of Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, a collection of ʿAlī's sermons and sayings, still considered a masterpiece of Arabic prose. See Djebli Moktar, "Nahdj al-Balāgha," in *EI2*.

[135] M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Some Remarks on the Divinity of the Imam," in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 103-31. See also See L. Massignon, "L'Homme Parfait en Islām et son Originalite Eschatologique," in *Opera Minora* (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1948), 122-5.

[136] Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 126-30.

[137] al-Jillī, *R. al-Andiya*: 331; Abū Sa'īd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, *Risālat al-Ẓuhūr wa-al-buṭūn bi-riwāyat al-Ṭabarānī*, ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 3 (*Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-ʿAlawiyya*) (Diyār 'Aql, Lubnān Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifah, 2006), 17; al-Daylamī, *Hidayat al-Mustarshid*: 191.

the last, I am the exoteric, I am the esoteric, I am omniscient, I am a mace of iron, I bring forth and return, I am the destroyer of ʿĀd and Thamūd."[138] By reciting these sermons to the masses the *bāb*s were thought to renew Alī's original declaration. But this job could not be undertaken by just anyone. As the above stories were so invested in showing, *nidāʾ* was reserved for the *bāb*s, who only undertook this mission under explicit instruction from their imams.

The Deification of the *Bāb* and the Abolition of *Nidāʾ*

Friedman has pointed out that the *bāb* had not always been considered part of the godhead. [139] Proto-Nuṣayrī works only mention the *maʿnā* and his *ism/ḥijāb*.[140] *Bāb* was the title used to describe the most intimate disciples of the Imams who, like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar, had charismatic followings in their own right. [141] However, with the occultation of the Twelfth Imam the institution of the *safīr* (representative) usurped that of the *bāb*.[142] The four *sufarāʾ* who claimed to speak for the hidden Imam endorsed a more moderate, rational strand of Imāmī thought. As Twelver Shiism took shape under their leadership, the mystical, esoteric, and *ghulāt* tendencies epitomized by the *bāb*s were deemed heretical and

[138] al-Jillī, *R. al-Andiya*: 331.

[139] See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 73-7.

[140] This dual conception is familiar from Ismāʿīlī (*ghulāt*) literature where it is the *ṣāmit* and *nāṭiq,* silent and speaking prophets, who form the inverted hierarchy of the godhead.

[141] See Tamima Bayhom-Daou, "Bāb (in Shiʿism)," in *EI3*. Al-Khaṣībī dedicated a large section of his *Hidāya al-Kubrā* to the 'Imāmī' institution of the *bāb* (it is not published in all versions of the *Hidāya*). See al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 338-91. This Silsalat al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī edition also includes long excerpts from al-Ṭabarānī's unpublished *K. al-maʿārif* that has been studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky, "Dogma and ritual in 'Kitāb al-Maʿārif' by the Nuṣayrī theologian Abū Saʿīd Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī," 43-65.

[142] On the *sufarāʾ* see V. Klemm, "The four *sufarāʾ* of the Twelfth Imām: On the formative period of the Twelver Shīʿa," in *Shīʿism*, ed. Etan Kohlberg (Burlington: Ashgate Variorum, 2003), 135-52. Al-Khaṣībī writes an interesting polemic against the *sufarāʾ* intended for an Imāmī (Twelver) audience in which he has the Imam explain that while the *safīr* may be in charge of his finances, the *bāb*, namely Ibn Nuṣayr, is in charge of disseminating his esoteric wisdom. See al-Khaṣībī, *al-Abwāb*: 392-96.

weeded out. Ibn Nuṣayr, the last man to declare himself a *bāb*, was excommunicated, as were his disciples, who eventually became the Nuṣayriyya.

It is in this context that the sectarian history of *ghuluww* truly begins. Prior to the Occultation *ghuluww* (or *tafwīḍ*) represented by the *bāb*s existed at the very core of Imāmī Shiism. It was only in the late 3rd/9th century that a concerted effort was made to define Twelver Shiism as something other than it. Friedman argues that as the *bāb* lost his place in mainstream Shiism, he was elevated to the rank of a deity in Nuṣayrī thought. This assessment is likely correct and would explain many of the uncomfortable features of Nuṣayrī theology, which likely resulted from the effort to reconcile a dual and a trinitarian godhead.[143]

Friedman also suggests that the move from a dualistic to a trinitarian schema may reflect the sect's move from a Zoroastrian to a Christian milieu. This is unlikely to be accurate. The dualism found in Iran and Iraq is that of two coeternal opposing forces: good and evil, light and dark, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. The dualism represented by the *maʿnā* and the *ism* is neither coeternal nor oppositional. The *ism* is an emanation from the *maʿnā* and is made of the same essential substance. [144]

However, the migration to Syria may have played a role in this shift in another respect. As has been shown in this study, the founders of the Nuṣayrī religion associated the act of *nidāʾ* with the institution of the *bāb.* In fact, when al-Khaṣībī began his career in Baghdad by announcing the divinity of the Imam, he was likely representing himself as the *bāb* of the hidden Muḥammad al-Mahdī. But something happened to him in prison because when he escaped and fled to Syria, he limited his preaching to covert cells of believers and began promoting secrecy

[143] There are many instances in which this discomfort becomes apparent, particularly in the context of the doctrines of *siyāqat al-maʿnā wa-l-ism* and *siyāqat al-bāb.*

[144] I'd like to credit Crone for pointing this out to me.

above all else. He must have realized that the time for *nidāʾ* had ended, and that the only way for the truth to survive was to take it underground.

As Friedman has demonstrated, al-Khaṣībī created a cover in order to allow him to continue his *ghulāt* activities unmolested.[145] He actively pursued a respectable Imāmī reputation, participating fully in Imāmī scholarly circles. At least one of his books, the *Hidāya al-Kubrā*, was written for and read by Twelver Shiites,[146] and several of his traditions were recorded in the canonical *Biḥār al-Anwār* of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī,[147]

Thus al-Khaṣībī began his career with a *nidāʾ* but ended it as a quietist and master dissimulator, paying lip service to Imāmī doctrine while at the same time organizing a secret community of believers. He authored the *Hidāya al-Kubrā* and the *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*, disavowing the belief in ʿAlī's divinity in the former while endorsing it in no uncertain terms in the latter. How was he able to do this? By elevating the *bāb* to an aspect of the godhead. This shift effectively ended the days of open declaration by portraying *nidāʾ* as something that only a god would do. In order to prevent the appearance of future pretenders to the role of *bāb*, al-Khaṣībī explained in several instances that when the final Imam went into occultation until the end of days so did the final *bāb.*[148] Thus there could no longer be *nidāʾ*, the time of *taqiyya* had begun.

This innovation is effectively what allowed for the formation and survival of the sect in Syria. Rather than *nidāʾ* and martyrdom, al-Khaṣībī taught his students to blend into their

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[145] Yaron Friedman, "al-Husayn ibn Hamdān al-Khasībī: A Historical Biography of the Founder of the Nusayrī-ʿAlawite Sect," *Studia Islamica* 93(2001): 102-3.

[146] al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, *Kitāb al-Hidāya al-kubrā* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Balāgh, 1986).

[147] al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*: 50:335; 78:395-7.

[148] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 55; Idem, *Fiqh al-Risāla*: 101, 10-11; Idem, *al-Abwāb*: 385.

surroundings and hide the truth. Knowledge of the Imams' divinity became a hidden commodity and ritual and sectarian lines formed around it to protect it. In this sense one can say that the sectarian history of the Nuṣayrīs began with the abolition of *nidāʾ*. From this point on revelation could only be done privately through individual initiation. It is with this process of initiation that the remainder of this study is concerned. Significantly, in the literature on initiation that developed in the generations after al-Khaṣībī the initiating shaykh is explicitly likened to the *bāb*, as will be shown in what follows.[149]

Before moving on to our analysis of the various ceremonies that comprise Nuṣayrī initiation, it is important to recognize that the same tensions of concealment and revelation epitomized by *nidāʾ* persisted on a smaller scale in the development of Nuṣayri initiation. This is one way in which we can understand the slow and multi-staged process of initiation, the unexplained rituals of the various ceremonies, the strange prayers, and the mystifying statements that lead to even greater obscurities. Like the masses hearing *nidāʾ*, revelation of the secret is a test for the novice. If he is worthy he will accept and all will eventually be explained. But if he proves unworthy the initiation process can be aborted without too much damage to the secret.

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[149] al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 55; Idem, *Al-Hidaya -al-Kubrā: al-Abwāb*: 385.

Excursus: Identifying a Source for al-Khaṣībī's Ibn Sabaʾ Narrative

Al-Khaṣībī sets his Ibn Sabaʾ narrative in the context of the miracles [*muʿjizāt* or *āyāt arḍiyya*, earthly signs] of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. This reveals his reliance on earlier sources that circulated among the Imāmīs of Kufa. A tradition is recorded in the *Fadāʾil* of Shādhān ibn Jibraʾīl (d. ~ 659/1261) in which the story of Ibn Sabaʾ's execution is connected to ʿAlī's revival of the decayed skull of the famous Sasanian King Kisrā Anūshīrwān. [150] This story, appropriately set in al-Madāʾin, the ancient Ctesiphon, which had been the capital of the Sassanid Empire and in early Islamic times became a veritable hotbed of *ghulāt* activity, is attributed to the 2nd/ 8th century ʿAmmār al-Ṣābāṭī (of Ṣābāṭ al-Madāʾin), whose identity will be discussed below.[151] In this story, the revived skull of Kisrā provides supernatural affirmation of ʿAlī's status by identifying him "in clear Arabic" [*bi-lisān faṣīḥ*] as "the commander of the faithful, the master of the legatees, and the leader of the pious." [152]

In understanding this miracle the people of Madāʾin took three positions: The best of them (i.e the proto-Imāmīs) accepted the skull's assessment that ʿAlī was merely a devout servant of God and legatee of the prophet Muḥammad. Others thought that his ability to revive the dead meant that he was a prophet. A third category, identified in the tradition as Ibn Sabaʾ

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[150] Shādhān b. Jibraʾīl al-Qummī, *al-Faḍāʾil*, ed. Muḥammad al-Mūsawī and ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣāliḥī (Qum: Muʾassasat Walī al-ʿAṣr lil-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 2001), 180-82; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*: XLI: 213-6.

[151] On the *ghulāt* presence in al-Madāʾin see L. Massignon, "Salmān Pāk", 457-58; Heinz Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten,'"(1981): 25.

[152] This is a Shiite version of the more popular Muslim tale of Jesus' revival of a decayed skull. See Evelyn Padwick, "The Nebi ʿIsa and the Skull," *Muslim World* 20(1930): 56-62; Roberto Tottoli, "The Story of Jesus and the Skull in Arabic Literature: The Emergence and Growth of a Religious Tradition," *JSAI* 28(2003): 225-59. As Sean Anthony points out, the transfer of the motif to ʿAlī is an example of how Shiites sought to liken ʿAlī to the prophet ʿĪsā. See Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*: 182-4.

and his followers, understood ʿAlī's miracle to be evidence of his divinity.[153] When ʿAlī heard about this he tried to dissuade them of their error. Those who did not repent, he executed by fire. A final notice in the story adds that a group of men emerged in the city who claimed, "If he had not had divinity within himself, he would not have burned us by fire," which is a reference to the *ḥadīth*, "no one punishes by fire except the Lord of fire," described above.

ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī, the narrator of this *ḥadīth*, is a curious figure in early Imāmī history. He is known to have been a disciple of the Imams Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim and his traditions can be found in many canonical Shiite *ḥadīth* collections.[154] However, he is also identified by the 4th/10th century heresiographer Abū Tammām as a member of the Mufaḍḍaliyya, the followers of the famous *ghālī* al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, revered by the Nuṣayrīs as the eighth *bāb*.[155] It seems that, like al-Mufaḍḍal and later al-Khaṣībī, ʿAmmār al-

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[153] In some versions of the story, the men who believe in ʿAlī's divinity are not Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers, but merely others who believed as he did and were therefore granted the same punishment that he suffered. They are described as *mithl 'Abd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ*. See al-Qummī, *al-Faḍāʾil*: 182. This seems needlessly convoluted and may simply be an attempt to reconcile the fact that this story is set in al-Madāʾin while most of the others are set in Kufa. Note that al-Khaṣībī claims that the identical event took place in both cities and in several others as well, because Ibn Sabaʾ was executed and resurrected several times.

[154] His full name was Abū al-Faḍl ʿAmmār b. Mūsā al-Sābāṭī. For information about him see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 253-4; Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād al-Nāʾīnī (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, 1988), II: 137-8; Ṭūsī *K. al-Istibṣar*, I: 372. There is also an entry in Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*: 199-200.

[155] See Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography: the "Bāb al-shayṭān" from Abū Tammām's Kitāb al-shajara* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 113; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, in Gimaret, Jolivet, and Monnot, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Peeters / Unesco, 1986), 493; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, 100; Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 28. Abū Tammām is the only heresiographer to explicitly list him as a member of the Mufaḍḍaliyya. However, his name does appear in other heresiographies. From these it seems that his primary offence was being a Fatḥite, someone who affirms the Imāmate of ʿAbd Allāh al-Aftāḥ. There is some indication in the Imāmī sources that he engaged in *ghulāt* speculations. A story is recorded in al-Kashshī in which ʿAmmār al-Ṣābāṭī asks Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq to reveal God's greatest name. When Jaʿfar finally agrees he puts his hand on the ground and the house begins to spin around them to the point that ʿAmmār fears that he will die (al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*: 253-54. I would like to thank Mushegh Asatryan for bringing this story to my attention.) We know from the reports about Bayān b. Samʿān and al-Mughīra b. Sāʿīd that speculation about God's greatest name was regular fare for the early Shiite *ghulāt.* ʿAmmār's interest in it might be an indication of his *ghulāt* leanings. He is also the principal narrator of another tradition recorded in Kulaynī in which ʿAlī turns back the sun (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, I: 319.) This same story is told by al-Khaṣībī as proof of ʿAlī's divinity, and is further evidence that ʿAmmār was involved in proto-Nuṣayrī circles. (See al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 31.) It is also known that ʿAmmār's son

Sābāṭī managed to walk the tightrope between acceptable Imāmī and more speculative *ghulāt* circles.[156] In the above tradition he seems to disagree with the Sabaʾiyya's interpretation of ʿAlī's miracle and to endorse their execution. However, in another version of this same story that was recorded in the (now lost?) *K. al-Anwār* of Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Humām al-Iskāfī (d. 336/948), ʿAmmār al-Ṣābāṭī portrays the Sabaʾiyya in a more favorable light.[157] According to this story, three days after ʿAlī burned these men and scattered their ashes to the winds, the people of al-Madāʾin came to him exclaiming:

> 'By God, by God, in the Religion of Muḥammad! [*wallāh wallāh fī dīn Muḥammad*] Those men that you burned in the fire have returned to their homes in a better condition than they were previously!' He said, 'Didn't I burn them in the fire, turn them to ash, and scatter them in the wind?' They said, 'yes.' He said, 'I burned them and God brought them back to life.'

This post-script undermines the Imāmī moral of the execution narrative and reveals ʿAmmār's sympathy for their cause. It shows that although ʿAlī washed his hands of the Sabaʾiyya and fulfilled his duty to execute them, God brought them back to life, as if in affirmation of their claims.

It is important to recognize that this account is a positive historical statement of what happened to Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers after the execution. In that sense it is very different from al-Maqdisī's report of the resurrection, which is presented as an errant *ghulāt* contention. Although ʿAmmār falls short of openly endorsing Ibn Sabaʾ's claim (and even calls those who

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Isḥāq transmitted *ḥadīth* from the *ghālī* Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, about whom more will be said later. While Najāshī considers ʿAmmār to be a trustworthy transmitter (al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*: II:138.), Ṭūsī writes in his *K. al-Istibṣar* I: 372 that he is a "weak transmitter, of corrupt doctrine," which is basically code for his having held *ghulāt* leanings.

[156] For an analysis of a-Mufaḍḍal's double-life see Heinz Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten', (1978). For al-Khaṣībī's see Yaron Friedman, "al-Khasībī: A Historical Biography,"; summarized in idem, *The Nuṣayrī-* ʿAlawīs: 17-34.

[157] Although I have not been able to locate this work, the *ḥadīth* and its origin can be found in Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn al-muʿjizāt*, ed. Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Kutubī (Najaf: Ḥaydariyya, 1369 (1950)), 10-12; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*: XLI: 216; Hāshim ibn Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz* (Muʾassasat Dār al-Ḥujjah lil-Thaqāfah, 2005), I: 90-92.

profess ʿAlī's divinity "confused" [*mutaḥayyirūn*]), he never doubts that these men were resurrected. Thus, although it is preserved in mainstream Twelver texts, ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī's story must be considered the earliest extant *ghulāt* articulation of the execution/resurrection motif.

In terms of dating this tradition, it is unlikely that the story of Ibn Sabaʾ's resurrection would have been so fully developed by ʿAmmār's time. The execution motif probably did not emerge before the 3rd/9th century and it would require some time for the story to gain enough currency to require a counter-polemic. It is possible that a later narrator attributed this story to ʿAmmār because of his known association with the Mufaḍḍaliyya and with the town of Ṣābāṭ al-Madāʾin in which the story is set.[158] Nevertheless, its existence suggests that this particular version of the story circulated among the proto-Nuṣayrī Imāmīs, which is likely how al-Khaṣībī learned the tale in the early 4th/10th century.

[158] The *isnād* given for this *ḥadīth* is ʿAbbās b. al-Faḍl - Mūsā b. ʿAṭiyya al-Anṣārī - Ḥassān b. Aḥmad al-Azraq - Abū al-Aḥwaṣ - his father - ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī. The *isnād* given for the previous *hadith* is not complete, all that is given is Abū al-Aḥwaṣ - His father - ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī. It seems likely that Abū al-Aḥwaṣ was the originator of the tradition, but without corroborating evidence, it is difficult to say. I am not even sure who this Abū al-Aḥwaṣ would be. Of the many men who went by this name, none can easily be connected to the earlier or later men in the chain.

Chapter Two: Marriage, Birth, and *Bāṭinī Taʾwīl*

A Study of Nuṣayrī Initiation Based on the Kitāb al-Ḥāwī fī ʿIlm al-Fatāwī of Abū Saʿīd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī[159]

In Nuṣayrī thought, esoteric knowledge is hidden in the open. It is concealed within exoteric truths, within natural phenomena, biological realities, and Quranic verses. This premise underlies the entire religious system of the Nuṣayrīs, from their most fundamental belief in the apotheosis of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, who hid his "esoteric [divine nature] within his exoteric [historic body],"[160] to their allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the Quran and Islamic law. The esoteric wisdom of the Nuṣayrīs functions through a process by which all apparent realities are allegorized and ascribed inner meanings. These meanings are considered to be the true sense of their exoteric indicators but they do not necessarily supplant them. Rather, they exist in a hierarchical correspondence where the laws of the natural world and of revealed religious texts serve as extended analogies for the secret truths and laws of the Nuṣayrī religion. This is why the imams of the Nuṣayrī community are required to have memorized the Quran, be proficient in Islamic jurisprudence, and understand such secular sciences as medicine, astrology, agriculture, dialectics and logic. [161] For without these exoteric sciences, how are they to have access to the esoteric truths hidden within them?

Perhaps the most fundamental rule of the Nuṣayrī religion is that exposure to esoteric wisdom is prohibited without proper initiation. The explanation given for this restriction is one

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[159] A slightly altered version of this chapter was published in *Arabica* 58 (2011), 53-75.

[160] Abū Saʿīd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī fī ʿIlm al-Fatāwī* in *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma al-ʿAlawiyya*, eds. Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā, [Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī] 3, (Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa: Diyār ʿAql, Lebanon, 2006), 82; Abū Saʿīd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Dalāʾil fī al-Masāʾil*, in *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma al-ʿAlawiyya*, eds. Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā, [Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī] 3, Diyār ʿAql: Lebanon, Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifah, 2006, 155.

[161] Arab MS 1450, Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale: 157a; al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī*: 106.

of the best examples of how Nuṣayrī *taʾwīl* (esoteric exegesis) functioned. This chapter will describe the stated import of the Nuṣayrī initiation ceremonies to explain how the Nuṣayrīs imagined the process through which one entered their community and gained access to these secrets. It will also show how the belief in a corresponding hidden reality allowed for the development of a parallel practical Nuṣayrī law based on the texts of the Quran and Ḥadīth. This correspondence reveals how deeply rooted the sect was in Islamic discourse and gives new insight into what it meant to be a *bāṭinī* (esotericist) in early Islamic times. Rather than enabling antinomianism and the abandonment of Islamic precepts, as has generally been assumed of the *baṭinī* stance, the belief in the existence of an esoteric sense to the Quran allowed the early Nuṣayrīs to create a hyper-legal world where both mundane and sectarian concerns were regulated by the laws of the Quran.

Nuṣayrī initiation is based on the following analogy: the transmission of esoteric truth is likened to sexual intercourse. Just as Islamic Law forbids sexual intercourse without a properly contracted marriage, so access to the secret teachings and rituals of the Nuṣayrī community is forbidden without a properly conducted initiation. The first stage of initiation is conceived of as a marriage between the sponsor who stands in the position of the husband and the student who is his wife. However, once the initiate has been 'impregnated' with the esoteric truths of the religion he can be 'reborn' nine months later in a second initiation ceremony as a man and a full-fledged member of the Nuṣayrī community. The relationship between the sponsor and his student then evolves from that of a husband and wife to that of a father and son. In other words, it is initiation that literally creates the Nuṣayrī male. Once the new believer has been born, there is a two-year period, conceived of as the breastfeeding stage, in which the believer is taught the secret laws and esoteric exegesis of the religion. The relationship between the sponsor and

student then also takes on the character of that between a mother and son or, if it is someone other than the sponsor who 'breastfeeds' him, a milk-mother and son. These relationships are conceived of as 'true' kinship as opposed to mere 'biological' consanguinity. All Quranic laws that apply to exoteric relations of marriage, parentage, and milk-kinship also apply to their esoteric equivalents relating to initiation.

This analogy and the laws that proceed from it are explained in detail in the *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī fī ʿIlm al-Fatāwī* (literally: the Book which Contains the Knowledge of Legal Rulings) of Abū Sa'īd Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 426/1034), first published by the Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa in 2006 in *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī* 3. Al-Ṭabarānī is perhaps the most important figure for the regularization of Nuṣayrī practice. His *K. al-Ḥāwī*, which is still one of the most revered texts of the Nuṣayrī community, includes over one hundred legal rulings relating to Nuṣayrī initiation. As such, it is the most extensive and earliest available discussion of the topic. Previous studies of Nuṣayrī initiation have been based on texts dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth hijrī centuries (19th-20th CE), nearly a millennium later. [162] The Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa's publication of this hitherto unavailable work is therefore a significant contribution to our knowledge of this rite, both in term of scope and antiquity.

At various points in the *K. al-Ḥawī*, al-Ṭabarānī attributes his ideas about initiation to his teacher Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jillī as well as to Abū Shuʿayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, the eponymous third/ninth century founder of the sect, suggesting that his ideas about initiation are based on an even older Nuṣayrī tradition.[163] The more recent descriptions of

[162] Yaron Friedman briefly surveys this work in his recently published *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 212-16.

[163] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 49,108-111. Al-Ṭabarānī mentions titles of two works, which he attributes to Ibn Nuṣayr, the *Kitāb al-Mawārid* and the *Kitāb al-Kāfī li-l-ḍidd al-munāfī.* These have not yet been published and I do not know if they are still extant.

Nuṣayrī initiation also seem to be based on the analogy of marriage and birth described by al-Ṭabarānī. The anonymous treatise titled *Sharḥ al-imām wa-mā yūjabu ʿalayhi* (an Explanatory tract on the Imam and his Duties), whose scribal date is 1211/1796, quotes, at times verbatim, sections of the *K. al-Ḥāwī* that present initiation as marriage.[164] The *Kitāb al-Bākūra al-sulaymāniyya fī kashf asrār al-diyāna al-nuṣayriyya* (The Book of Sulaymān's First Ripe Fruit Disclosing the Secrets of the Nuṣayrī Religion), written by the thirteenth/nineteenth century Nuṣayrī apostate, Sulaymān al-Adhanī, describes one of the stages of his initiation into Nuṣayrism as a nine month induction period.[165] This is most likely based on the analogy to human gestation proposed by al-Ṭabarānī. One can therefore speak of a Nuṣayrī model of initiation that spans the full history of the sect.

The Initiatory Marriage

At the beginning of his account of Nuṣayrī initiation, al-Ṭabarānī proclaims, "*taʿlīq* is *nikāḥ* [marriage], there is no doubt." [166] This equation is the key to understanding the complex system of rules governing entrance to the Nuṣayrī community. *Taʿlīq*, meaning attachment, is the first stage in the graduated process of Nuṣayrī initiation and is conducted as a marriage between a full-fledged Nuṣayrī believer and an uninitiated youth. As in an Islamic marriage ceremony, *taʿlīq* must be contracted before an imam and witnessed before two men. This marriage allows

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[164]Fols. 160b-162b are almost exclusively a paraphrase of the discussion of *taʿlīq* and *samāʿa* in the *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī.* A summary of the initiation ceremonies described in this manuscript can be found in Dussaud, René. *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairīs*, 106-113; Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī, *al-ʿAlawīyūn al-nuṣayrīyūn*, 85-92; and in Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 372-7.

[165] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 3.

[165] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 3.

[166] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 49.

the student to partake, for the first time, in some of the important rituals of the sect, most significantly the drinking of the consecrated wine called *ʿabd al-nūr*, the servant of the light, which accompanies all Nuṣayrī religious gatherings. It also makes it permissible for him to hear the sacred utterance, *sirr ʿa-m-s* (the mystery of *ʿayn-mīm-sīn*), for the first time. The word *ʿa-m-s*, referred to as *al-Kālima al-ʿĀliya* (the most high word), is an acronym for ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Fārisī, the three historic figures who comprise the Nuṣayrī trinity. The unity and divinity of these three characters, epitomized through the joining of their initials in the word *ʿa-m-s*, is considered a great secret and is first revealed to the initiate during *taʿlīq*.[167]

Al-Ṭabarānī explains that what occurs during the *taʿlīq* ceremony is "the initial penetration of the wife." It is the first time that "the two of them are united in *ʿa-m-s*," the central mystery of the Nuṣayrī religion. Their union is thought of as "the implanting of the sperm into the womb,"[168] the first step in the creation of a new Nuṣayrī believer. The length of the marriage between the *sayyid* (master) and his student averages nine months "to echo the length of pregnancy."[169] However, as in a biological pregnancy, where a fetus can be viable after seven months, a very successful student might give birth after only seven months of study while others might take much longer. For as al-Ṭabarānī points out, "not every wife achieves pregnancy from her first night."[170] It is also possible for the student to be "barren and sterile, just as it occurs among women," and never to achieve pregnancy. Al-Ṭabarānī relates that he has seen a student

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[167] *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, in *Kutub al-ʻAlawīyīn al-muqaddasah*, eds. Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā, [Silsilat al-Turāth al-ʿalawī] 9, (Dār li-ajl al-maʻrifah: Diyār ʻAql, Lebanon, 2008), 216.

[168] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 54.

[169] Ibid., 49.

[170] Ibid., 55.

who was attached to his *sayyid* for over twenty years and failed to progress to the next stage of initiation.[171]

But even once successful conception has been achieved, a fruitful birth cannot be guaranteed. There is always the possibility of miscarriage, which occurs when a student rejects the religious truths disclosed to him by his *sayyid*. In this situation, the initiation process is terminated just as a fetus is aborted. [172] For as al-Ṭabarānī explains, religious knowledge is what gives life to a person and without this knowledge a person cannot survive. "Death is not the demise of the body according to what we have testified, it is the demise of the soul. Its life is its establishment in the sanctity of knowledge and its death is its denial and rejection."[173] So while *taʿlīq* begins the process of Nuṣayrī initiation by uniting a student to his Nuṣayrī sponsor who can grant him access to some religious secrets, it does not guarantee his successful rebirth as a full-fledged Nuṣayrī believer.

Achieving a healthy delivery is the responsibility of the student and depends on the fertility of his mind and his capacity to internalize belief. While not explicitly stated by al-Ṭabarānī, the analogy to marriage and gestation at the core of this first stage of initiation implicitly credits the student with his own spiritual rebirth. For during the period of *taʿlīq* the student does not merely act as a wife who is passively inseminated by her husband, but he also plays the role of the pregnant mother as well as the developing fetus of the believer who will eventually be born. In other words, during *taʿlīq*, the student acts as his own parent, bearing and giving birth to himself. It is not only the teacher's instruction that allows him to be reborn as a

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171 Ibid.

172 Ibid., 56.

173 Ibid.

believer, but also his own dedication and perseverance that empowers him to find belief within himself and to self-generate as a member of the Nuṣayrī community.

In Islamic law, *nikāḥ* is not the only type of union that legitimates sexual intercourse between a husband and wife. There are also lesser forms of marriage that can accomplish this goal. The same is true in the context of Nuṣayrī initiation. *Taʿlīq* is only the most normative way by which one can gain access to religious secrets. There are also lower forms of initiation modeled on Quranic marital equivalents.[174] In Islamic law, if a man does not have the financial means to take a wife from among the believing free women, he may marry a believing slave-woman belonging to another man. This arrangement is not ideal because the woman is considered to be jointly owned by both her master and her husband, although only the husband may have sexual access to her. Any children resulting from this union remain slaves and the property of the owner. The purpose of such a marriage is therefore not procreation but rather, as stated in Quran 4, 25, to protect a poor man who cannot afford a free wife from the temptations of fornication.[175] In its esoteric equivalent, this type of union is called *sharb al-sār*, drinking the *sār*,[176] and refers to a union with a *sayyid* that allows for the student to participate in the drinking

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[174] Al-Ṭabarānī does not specify what would be the equivalent of sexual relations with one's own slave-girl. If the equation between licit sexual intercourse and disclosing religious secrets were complete, this category too should have an esoteric equivalent.

[175] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 51.

[176] The term *sharb al-sār* has traditionally been translated as "drinking the mystery" since this is its apparent meaning from the context where initiates are given this or that religious mystery (*sirr*) to drink. However, it may be more appropriate to translate the name of the ceremony as "drinking the remnant (*suʾr*)" since during the ceremony the novice is given a remnant of the *ʿabd al-nūr* of his master. See, for example, the description of *taʿlīq* in the "Silsilat al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī" *K.al-Mashyakha*, 216, where the novice is instructed to kiss a drop of wine (*athar min al-suʾr)* off of the hand of his *sayyid*. Al-Ṭabarānī supports this interpretation when he writes, "the *sār* is the *sūr* (remnant), and the *sūr* of the believers is a cure." (*Kitāb al-Ḥāwī*, 75.) Most likely, the term *sār* is a play on the similarity between both the word for remnant and for mystery. In the description of the initiatory ceremonies found in the *Sharḥ al-Imām* the student is repeatedly instructed to drink both the *sār* and the *sirr* of various personalities highlighting the alliteration between the two words and implying that there is a difference between them. (Arab MS 1450, 159b, 160a, 167a). The term *sār* takes on additional meaning in the analogy to marriage spelled out by al-Ṭabarānī. As described above, during *sharb al-sār* the novice stands in the position of a slave wife *surriyya* (pl.

of the *ʿabd al-nūr* and to learn certain rudimentary religious ideas.[177] But it does not include the utterance of *sirr ʿa-m-s* and consequently can never result in offspring, i.e. in the creation of a full-fledged believer. Since *sharb al-sār* is not the ideal form of attachment, al-Ṭabarānī advises that a student who is found worthy should progress to *taʿlīq* with his *sayyid* no later than a month from the date of his initial *sharb al-sār* ceremony.[178] As it turns out, many students begin their initiation with this lesser form of attachment before progressing to *taʿlīq*.[179]

The other form of marriage permitted by some schools of Islamic law is called *mutʿa* or temporary marriage. The word literally means pleasure, as the legitimizing of sexual intercourse is its sole purpose. The marriage does not require witnesses or the permission of the woman's guardian. It is simply contracted between the partners who agree to be married for a fixed time at the end of which the marriage is dissolved without the need for a divorce. *Mutʿa* marriage has been exceedingly controversial in Islamic law and is generally prohibited by Sunni Muslims. But as the author of the *Sharḥ al-imām* succinctly points out, "*mutʿa* marriage is permissible for the

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sarārī) and so the word *sār* may also allude to the esoteric role of the student in this relationship. (See *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī,* 49, 54.) Also see discussion of this rite in Ch 4.

[177] Ibid., 49, 54.

[178] Ibid., 55.

[179] From the description of his initiation found in the *K. al-Bākūra,* it would appear that Sulaymān al-Adhanī started his course of initiation with a *sharb al-sār* ceremony. In his account the ceremony is called *al-mashwara* (the deliberation). In it he was made to hold his *sayyid*'s sandal over his head in a sign of obeisance and was enjoined to secrecy before being given to drink the *ʿabd al-nūr*. This is exactly the process described by al-Ṭabarānī (*K. al-Ḥāwī*, 54) regarding the *sharb al-sār* ceremony. After this, Sulaymān was made to wait forty days (as opposed to the thirty prescribed in the *K. al-Ḥāwī*) before he progressed to the next stage of initiation which he calls *jamʿiyyat al-malīk* (the king's assembly) equivalent to the *taʿlīq* ceremony of the *K. al-Ḥāwī*. He was given the *ʿabd al-nūr* to drink and instructed to recite 'the mystery of *ʿa-m-s'* five hundred times a day. Sulaymān says that it took him seven months to progress to the next stage of initiation but that most people are required to wait nine months. This is the indication that Sulaymān's initiation was probably based on the model of marriage and birth. After this important ceremony, which included the laying on of hands, recital of certain Nuṣayrī prayers, drinking the *ʿabd al-nūr,* the presentation of sponsors and finally the official oath of secrecy, Sulaymān was taken to his *sayyid's* house for a long course of study equivalent to the breastfeeding period of al-Ṭabarānī. It was at this point, after learning the secrets of his religion, that Sulaymān began doubting his faith and eventually turned apostate.

Shiites."[180] Since Nuṣayrīs consider themselves to be the true Shiites (partisans of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib), it is not surprising that they include this type of union in their esoteric interpretation of Islamic marital law. Al-Ṭabarānī explains that if a person "wants to convey the secret of God to someone he senses has integrity, but there are no believers in that town and none within a distance of a day's travel, then he can relate [the secret word] to him without witnesses after he has taken the oath from him…This is on the model of *mutʿa* marriage."[181]

In a *mutʿa* marriage, the offspring of the union are considered to be legitimate and the responsibility of the father. Likewise, when a Nuṣayrī is initiated without witnesses, he may still 'conceive' and be 'born' as a full-fledged believer after the requisite gestation period.[182] But as al-Ṭabaranī points out, a marriage with witnesses is preferable: "The greater the number of witnesses the better. For as God says, 'when you hand over to them their possessions, let there be [many] witnesses on their behalf, God is sufficient in taking accounts.'" [183] The passage that al-Ṭabarānī adduces here comes from Quran 4, 6 and does not actually refer to the need for having witnesses at a wedding. It pertains to the obligation of having witnesses present when a guardian returns the property to his orphaned ward. The conflation of the rules for marriage with those for dealing with orphans is not simple carelessness on al-Ṭabaranī's part. In the *taʾwīl* practiced by Nuṣayrī scholars, there are various Quranic terms that refer to students and can be used in expounding the rules for their initiation. The most important are 'women,' 'wives,' and eventually 'sons,' according to the analogy to marriage and birth. But all mentions of orphans,

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[180]Arab MS 1450, 160b.

[181] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 48.

[182] Arab MS 1450, 61a.

[183] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 48.

poor people, immigrants, travelers, and holy warriors also refer to students.[184] This is because of their lack of knowledge and religious mentorship and the difficult journey they embark upon in order to become believers.

But the most comprehensive Quranic cipher for student is the feminine form. Aside from interpreting all legal prescriptions for dealing with women as instructions for dealing with initiates, al-Ṭabarānī explains that "all of the praiseworthy names in the Quran which refer to the feminine… such as, 'women who submit themselves to God, believing women, pious women, repentant women, women who incline towards fasting, be they previously married or maidens,'[185] actually refer to students."[186] In this case, al-Ṭabarānī does not merely propose a parallel reality where laudatory feminine terms in the Quran refer exoterically to women but esoterically to students, he takes pains to nullify the apparent meaning of the words altogether. This is because the vilification of women is an essential feature of Nuṣayrī cosmology. In the Nuṣayrī creation myth, women are believed to have been created from the sins of the devils.[187] As such, they can never become believers or participate in the salvific religious rituals of the Nuṣayrī community. The best they can hope for is to be reborn in a future life as men who may then strive to enter the community.[188] As a result of this belief, the Quranic references to believing or righteous women are oxymoronic, they are ideological impossibilities, and must refer to something else. Interpreting these as code words for students effectively eliminates the

[184] Ibid., p. 115.

[185] This list is from Quran 66, 5.

[186] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 115.

[187] Al-Mufaḍḍal Ibn 'Umar al-Ju'fī, *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla*, ed. Aref Tamer, (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970), 49, 143-4; al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalā'il*, 141,145; al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 61.

[188] Al-Ju'fī, *K. al-Haft*, 142-3.

feminine from their religious discourse and at the same time provides prooftexts for their doctrinal views and legal dealings with male students. This position is most clearly stated in another work of al-Ṭabarānī, the *Kitāb al-Dalāʾil fī l-Masāʾil* (Book of the Proofs for the Questions) in which he asks, "how it is possible that God praised women in His Book when all of the People of Unity[189] vilify them?"[190] He replies, "women are all blameworthy and therefore the mention of praiseworthy women in the Book of God, may He be exalted, are the students. The Gnostic is male and the one who seeks knowledge is female. The tongue of the Gnostic is the penis and the ear of the one who seeks knowledge is… the vulva."[191]

Nuṣayrī Initiation and Charges of Homosexuality

The sexualization of the transmission of religious knowledge is striking and immediately calls to mind the oft-repeated claim of the fourth/tenth century Imāmī heresiographer al-Nawbakhtī that Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, the founder of the sect, promoted sodomy as a moral ideal. In his *Firaq al-Shīʿa* (The Divisions of the Shiites), Nawbakhtī writes that Ibn Nuṣayr "permitted [his followers] to have sex with one another in their anuses. He claimed that this [practice] is among the things which attest modesty and humility [in the passive partner] and that it is one of the desires and delights [for the active partner] and that God did not prohibit it."[192] While accusations of sexually deviant behavior are common features of Islamic heresiographical

[189] This is the term that al-Ṭabarānī usually uses when referring to his community.

[190] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*, 124.

[191] Ibid., 124-25.

[192] al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, 110-11. These same charges appear in greater detail in al-Qummī, *K. al-Maqālāt*, 100. Al-Nawbakhtī and al-Qummī's entries are both based on the earlier, now lost, heresiography of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam titled *Kitab Ikhtilāf al-nās fī l-imāma*. See Wilferd Madelung, "Some Remarks on the Imāmī Firaq Literature," in *Shi'ism*, ed. Etan Kohlberg [the Formation of the Classical Islamic World] 33, Burlington, VT, Ashgate Variorum, 2003, 153-167.

entries, al-Nawbakhtī's allegation is somewhat different. Most accusations of immoral behavior in the heresiographies have to do with the sectarians' illicit relations with women such as incest or the communal sharing of wives.[193] Accusations of sodomy are somewhat less common but when they do occur, they usually follow a long list of Islamic prohibitions that the sectarians willfully transgress. For example, al-Baghdādī claims that the Janāḥiyya "allowed the use of wine, the eating of carcasses, fornication, sodomy, and the other prohibited things."[194] This type of charge does not differentiate between sexual crimes such as sodomy and fornication, and dietary restrictions such as drinking wine or eating improperly slaughtered meat. Sodomy is merely another expression of the sectarians' antinomian stance towards Islamic law. Al-Nawbakhtī's charge against the Nuṣayrīs is different in that it portrays their homoerotic behavior as the fulfillment of a religious ideal in and of itself.[195] One therefore wonders whether al-Nawbakhtī's account might have been informed by some knowledge that the Nuṣayrī initiation process is conducted as a marriage between two men.[196]

[193] These latter charges seek to portray the sectarians as crypto-Zoroastrians and crypto-Mazdakites respectively. It was common knowledge among Islamic theologians that pre-Islamic Zoroastrians promoted incestuous marriages and that Mazdak, the famous fifth century CE Zoroastrian heresiarch, proclaimed the communal ownership of wives and property. See also Appendix A on the possibility that some of these libertine rites were actually practiced by certain Nuṣayrī groups in the nineteenth century.

[194] Halkin, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, 60.

[195] Another example of the portrayal of sodomy as a sectarian religious practice in and of itself is al-Baghdādī's description of the fourth/tenth century heresiarch, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī, who "permitted sodomy, maintaining that it was the communication of light from the superior to the inferior" (Ibid., 85). This charge is similar to that of al-Nawbakhtī, since it proposes a religious incentive for the practice of sodomy, but al-Baghdādī's charge seems to imply that al-Shalmaghānī was under some sort of Manichean influence, since Manichaeism taught that sperm was the site in which light was most concentrated. Of course, in Manichaean thought, this is exactly what made sexual intercourse so reprehensible, since it forced the light found within sperm to be trapped in material bodies while in Baghdādī's description of the followers of the al-Shamaghānī, the communication of light is a positive outcome of sexual intercourse.

[196] There is a telling heresiographical entry on the Mukhamissa who were forerunners of the Nuṣayriyya, found in al-Qummī's *K. al-Maqālāt,* 58, which supports the idea that al-Nawbakhtī was aware of the analogy to marriage behind Nuṣayrī initiation. Al-Qummī claims that the Mukhamissa abolished Islamic marriage and held that the esoteric meaning of marriage is the contracting of a union with a fellow (male) believer with the dowry being the transmission of esoteric wisdom. If this idea was told of forerunners of the sect, it is likely that it was also known

Establishing a direct connection between al-Nawbakhtī's charge of sodomy and Nuṣayrī conceptions of initiation cannot be done with any degree of plausibility. It is always possible that al-Nawbakhtī's claim was completely unfounded and that the similarity between his description of Nuṣayrī behavior and their sexualized portrayal of the transmission of knowledge is merely coincidental. But even if a core of truth is conceded, it is clear that al-Nawbakhtī's report is based on a misunderstanding of Nuṣayrī ideas and not on the religiously condoned practice of sodomy among the followers of Ibn Nuṣayr. Nuṣayrī literature is full of vociferous denunciations of homosexuality. This is true of their earliest texts, including the *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla* (The Book of Seven and Shadows), attributed to the second/eighth-century proto-Nuṣayrī al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʻUmar, which portrays passive homosexuality (*ubna*) as a disease inflicted upon those who were enemies of the believers in past lives. An alternate explanation given by the *K. al-Haft* is that passive homosexuals were immoral women in previous lives and that God punished them by making them return as men who retained the desire of women to be penetrated. Regardless of the reason for homosexuality, the *K. al-Haft* is adamant that the affliction is one that is never imposed upon believers.[197] Writing several centuries later, al-Ṭabarānī is just as opposed to homosexuality, insisting on numerous occasions that passive homosexuals can never be initiated, nor can they ever become believers.[198] Considering the hostile stance towards homoeroticism found in the works of the sect, it is unlikely that their founder, Ibn Nuṣayr, would have promoted sexual relations between men as a moral duty. As mentioned above, al-Ṭabarānī attributes

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about the Nuṣayrīs. On the relationship between the Mukhamissa and the Nuṣayriyya see Heinz Halm,"Das »Buch der Schatten« Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ghulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairiertums," *Der Islam*, 58 (1981), 61-4.

[197] Al-Juʻfī, *K. al-Haft*, 140-41.

[198]Abū Saʿīd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Risālah al-Jawhariyyah*, in *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma al-ʿalawiyya*, [*Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿalawī* 3], 2006, p. 25; al-Ṭabarānī, K. al-Ḥāwī, 67, 75.

aspects of the analogy between *taʿlīq* and marriage to Ibn Nuṣayr. Therefore, if there is any core of truth to al-Nawbahtī's report, it is probably that Ibn Nuṣayr promoted a form of initiation structured as a marriage between men, but not that he endorsed the practice of sodomy among his followers.[199]

Regulating the Initiatory Marriage

Needless to say, sexual descriptions of the transmission of knowledge found in Nuṣayrī literature are figurative and do not allude to physical intimacy between teacher and student. They merely seek to reinforce the private and juristically regulated nature of religious knowledge, which can only be revealed within the bonds of an exclusive union. Knowledge shared outside of this union is considered *zinā* (fornication) and a person who obtains it in this way is both a fornicator and a bastard.[200] But having contracted *taʿlīq* does not provide a student with open access to religious knowledge. He may only obtain it from his own teacher. Just as marriage creates bonds of sexual exclusivity between a wife and husband, *taʿlīq* creates bonds of intellectual exclusivity between the novice and his teacher. It is therefore prohibited for a believer to relate religious secrets to someone else's student while they are in the stage of *taʿlīq*. Doing so is considered *zinā* and according to al-Ṭabarānī, this is the esoteric meaning of the

[199] In support of this idea, one finds a statement made by Isḥaq al-Aḥmar, an associate (and eventual rival) of Ibn Nuṣayr who, in explaining the blameworthy and praiseworthy aspects of various actions, says that while the exoteric expression of homosexuality (*liwāt*) is blameworthy, its esoteric and praiseworthy equivalent is, "asking the one who is more knowledgeable than you about the knowledge of *tawḥīd* (the unity of God), for the believer who is more knowledgeable is male, and the one who less knowledgeable is female." This is preserved in al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq Asrār al-dīn* in *Majmūʿat al-Harrāniyīn 1: al-muʾalafāt al-khāṣṣa* [Silsilāt Al-Turāth Al-ʿalawī 4], 2006, 167-168. I would like to thank Mushegh Asatryan for directing my attention to this quotation.

[200] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*, 120, 122.

prohibition of adultery found in Quran 17, 32: "do not commit adultery for behold it is an abomination and an evil way."[201]

It should be pointed out that the rules of exclusivity are not the same for the Nuṣayrī teacher and student. Just as in Islamic law, where a man can take several wives at once while a woman must remain monogamous, a *sayyid* is permitted to attach to several students simultaneously while a student can only do *taʿlīq* with one teacher at a time. As al-Ṭabarānī explains, "the student is in the position of women while the *sayyid* is the male spouse. And [since] God, may He be exalted, says, 'marry women of your choice, two, three, or four,'"[202] a believer can do *taʿlīq* with many students at once. The number recommended by the Quranic analogy is four but al-Ṭabarānī interprets it generously as allowing nine students per teacher since the prophet Muḥammad had nine wives simultaneously.[203]

The analogy to marriage gives rise to another inequality in the *taʿlīq* bond, namely, in the right to sever the bond. As al-Ṭabarānī points out, "divorce is the right of men and not of women,"[204] and therefore a student is not allowed to leave his *sayyid* and contract *taʿlīq* with another man. If there are exigent circumstances, such as the student needing to emigrate to a distant village, he may ask his *sayyid* for a divorce but it is the teacher's prerogative to refuse.[205] For his part, the *sayyid* is encouraged to stay with his student and not to complicate their relationship by moving far away from him. However he can end their attachment if the student

[201] Ibid., *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 93-94; Idem, *K. al-Dalāʾil*, 121-2.

[202] Quran 4, 3.

[203] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 48, 108.

[204] Ibid., 51.

[205] Ibid., 77.

displeases him, although this is generally seen as a last resort after all means of reconciliation have been exhausted.

In the case of a disobedient student, al-Ṭabarānī offers the Quranic recommendation for dealing with *nushūz* (wifely insubordination) before opting to end the relationship. He writes: [206]

> If a student disobeys his *sayyid* and drinks with the opponents, this is *nushūz*, and God, may He be exalted, says, "For those women whose *nushūz* you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them; and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them."[207] The meaning of "leave them alone in bed" is that you should not drink with him and you should not converse with him regarding any of the esoteric knowledge. The meaning of "beat them" is that you should cut them off. As for "if they pay you heed do not seek to harm them," it means through repentance and showing obedience.

The Quranic instruction to 'admonish first' is self-explanatory and easily translates to the context of initiation. As for the recommendation to withhold sex from a disobedient wife, al-Ṭabarānī interprets it as denying the *ʿabd al-nūr* and religious secrets to a disobedient student. Only once this has been tried should the teacher opt for divorce.

Al-Ṭabarānī does point out that a more rigorous view exists which recommends that a teacher need not wait but should immediately repudiate his student if he finds him fraternizing with opponents or speaking of what he should not. This is because *taʿlīq*, like *nikāḥ*, is predicated on agreement to obedience and exclusivity. Once the student has disobeyed his teacher or begun sharing religious secrets with outsiders, he has effectively violated his marriage vow and can be sent away. In this case a distinction is made between a student attached through *taʿlīq* and one attached through *sharb al-sār*. As mentioned, *sharb al-sār* is a lower form of attachment analogous to marriage with a slave-girl. The same Quranic verse that permits marriage with slave-women also states that if these 'slave-wives' become "guilty of immoral

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[206] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 50.

[207] Quran 4, 34.

conduct, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free married women are liable."[208] Since they do not have the same rights as a free woman in their marriage, they are not held to the same standard when they violate it. The same follows for the student attached through *sharb al-sār*. If he is caught violating the terms of his attachment, he is supposed to be reprimanded and threatened but should not be punished with the same severity as one who has committed to *taʿlīq*.[209]

If a repudiation is to take place, for logistical purposes or because of a falling out, the teacher must recite three times the statement, "bear witness for me o so-and-so [insert name of witness] that I have abandoned my student so-and-so [insert name of student] and there does not remain between us any connection."[210] This triple repudiation is modeled on the Islamic triple divorce, which severs absolutely the connection between husband and wife, making it unlawful for them to get back together without an intervening marriage of the wife to another man. The dismissal can also be done in writing.[211] After it has been finalized, the connection between student and teacher is completely severed, and the student is not permitted to include the name of his former teacher when reciting his religious pedigree before drinking the *ʿabd al-nūr* at some future date.[212]

If the teacher and student agree to be separated because of some exigency, the student may seek to be reattached to a new *sayyid*, but he cannot do it immediately. He must wait a year, comprised of nine months for the length of *taʿlīq* modeled upon pregnancy and another three

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[208] Quran 4, 25.

[209] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 51.

[210] Ibid., 78.

[211] Ibid., 76.

[212] Ibid.

months for a ʿ*idda* period.[213] In Islamic law, a divorced woman is made to wait a three-month interval called a ʿ*idda* before remarrying in order to leave enough time between sexual partners to ascertain the paternity of any child she might be carrying. Since the laws of initiation follow the laws of marriage in every other respect, it makes sense that al-Ṭabarānī would recommend a three month ʿ*idda* period before forming a new attachment. But his insistence on a nine-month *taʿlīq* period modeled on the length of pregnancy in addition to the three months of ʿ*idda* seems redundant and might be based on something other than a strict mimicking of Islamic Law.

But in most respects, the assimilation of *taʿlīq* and marriage is so complete that every Quranic law relating to marriage and the regulation of sexual intercourse has an esoteric equivalent. The Quranic prohibition of having sex with one's wife while she is menstruating found in Quran 2, 222 is interpreted by al-Ṭabarānī as an interdiction of teaching students religious secrets if they are not completely honest. For as al-Ṭabarānī writes, "dishonesty is the menstruation of men," and just as a man may not have sex with his wife when she is menstruating, so a *sayyid* may not teach his student religious secrets when he is being dishonest.[214]

The analogy even extends beyond the rules of initiation to affect other aspects of religious life. For example, Islamic law demands that a man who has touched a woman should perform ablutions with water, a ritual called *wuḍūʾ*, before starting prayer. Based on this law, al-

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[213] Ibid., 76, 95.

[214] Ibid., 78. The analogy between dishonesty and menstruation is explained by al-Ṭabarānī as follows: Quran 9, 28 states, "the polytheists are unclean and they shall not approach the sacred mosque." Quran 16, 105 establishes the equation between polytheists and liars when it says, "those who invent falsehoods are those who don't believe in the signs of God." Since liars are equated to polytheists, liars must also be banned from the sacred mosque. The sacred mosque is then understood to mean religious secrets and so liars are banned from studying religious secrets. Since we know that the rules governing religious secrets are analogous to those governing sexual intercourse, the prohibition of having sex with women during their menstrual cycle found in Quran 2, 222 is interpreted as an interdiction of teaching students religious secrets when they are dishonest.

Ṭabarānī instructs believers to wash themselves before prayer if they have had physical contact with a student. He goes on to explain that "after ablutions and entering into prayer, it is not permissible to touch a student or shake hands with him because he is in the position of women," and physical contact with him would break the believer's ritually clean status.[215]

This rule shows the kind of slippage that can occur when allegorizing one practical law to create another. In the case of *wuḍūʾ*, women correspond to students but the context of prayer and the physical act of touching remain constant throughout the analogy. Thus touching is not a metaphor for disclosing religious secrets as in other Quranic laws regulating sexual contact with women, but instead remains mundane, simply referring to inadvertent touching and shaking hands with students in greeting. Ironically, the cure for a broken state of *wuḍūʾ* is not either construed literally. Instead of demanding ablution with water, al-Ṭabarānī instructs the person who touched a student after beginning his prayers to perform an 'esoteric' or 'inward' ablution (by rubbing his face and hands); this is because the end of the Quranic verse regulating *wuḍūʾ* says, "pass lightly over your face and hands. God does not want to impose any hardship on you, but wants to make you pure."[216] Exoterically, this qualification refers to the permission to cleanse the body with sand when no water can be found. But al-Ṭabarānī interprets it to mean that "God has removed the burdens from upon you and [doesn't want to trouble you with the requirement of] exoteric *wuḍūʾ* and the chill of water."[217]

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[215] Ibid., 73.

[216] Quran 5, 6.

[217] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 74. It should be pointed out that al-Ṭabarānī does not deny the need for ritual ablutions, as the Nuṣayrīs are often accused of doing. He merely insists that there are literal and allegorical ways of fulfilling the obligation of *wuḍūʾ*. If I understand correctly, he says that the initial *wuḍūʾ* needs to be with water but if someone has to do a subsequent ablution, he may do it esoterically, without water. But al-Ṭabarānī never rejects the obligation as such. In fact, he takes the opportunity in this context to polemicize against a rival sect, the Isḥāqiyya, who "don't don't do ablutions either exoterically or esoterically" before prayer but rather "seek blessing from pure wine at the end of prayer and consider it in the place of *wuḍūʾ*." He insists that the Isḥāqī practice "has no ground to

Initiation and the Imagined Community

Reinterpreting Quranic directives for dealing with women as instructions for dealing with students not only informs the laws of Nuṣayrī initiation, it also enables the construction of the first layer of social relationships that form the Nuṣayrī community. The relationship of teacher and student bound in *taʿlīq* extends beyond their particular union to impose obligations and restrictions on the partners' families. The 'biological' (*ṭabīʿī*) relatives of the teacher and student become 'real' (*ḥaqīqī*) in-laws and must be treated as such by the partners. All of the Quranic restrictions that come into play when two people are married have their equivalents in the esoteric law of initiation. For example, a teacher cannot contract *taʿlīq* with two biological brothers simultaneously since Islamic law forbids marriage with two sisters at once.[218] Nor can he become attached to a boy and then to that boy's biological father; a man may not marry his mother-in-law and contracting *taʿlīq* with his student's biological father would violate that restriction. Likewise, a teacher may not do *talīq* with his biological son's student because Islamic law forbids a man to marry his daughter-in-law. [219] Finally, a man may not become attached to his student's biological son because a man may not marry his stepdaughter.[220] All of these examples, modeled on the forbidden degrees of marriage found in Quran 4, 23, show how the

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it, for *wuḍūʾ* after prayer is not helpful and not permissible either in the exoteric or in the esoteric." See also al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 63.where Ṭabarānī insists that washing the body after sexual intercourse (*ghasl al-janābah*) is "obligatory according to the people of truth." But in this context, the requirement refers to washing after sexual contact with women. See also Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī, *Kitāb Bāṭin al-ṣalāt*, in *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma al-ʿAlawiyya*, [Silsilat al-Turāth Al-ʿAlawī 2], 2006, 261-6. Here Jillī, al-Ṭabarānī's teacher, describes the exoteric obligations of ritual ablution as well as their esoteric meanings.

[218] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 66.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid.

biological families of the teacher and student attached through *taʿlīq* are brought into the union and are subject to the esoteric equivalents of all Quranic laws relating to in-laws. In this way, the Nuṣayrī community is reinforced through bonds of *taʿlīq* in the same way that Islamic communities are held together through bonds of marriage.

The kinship ties that are formed through Nuṣayrī initiation become even more complex when the student graduates to the next stage of Nuṣayrī initiation, called *samāʿ* (hearing). As mentioned above, *samāʿ* generally occurs nine months after *taʿlīq*, and is conceived of as the birth of the Nuṣayrī believer. It is called *samāʿ* because it is the end result of having heard the sacred word during the *taʿlīq* ceremony. As al-Ṭabarānī explains, "the analogy [of *samāʿ*] is to birth because he was silent and then pronounced the unity of God, and the sperm of his *sayyid* sought a child through [the utterance of the] the most high word."[221] Once the student has advanced to this stage of initiation, he has progressed from "the level of women to the level of men."[222] His teacher, previously imagined as his husband who inseminated him with religious truths, becomes his father who conceived him. At this point, the teacher and student can no longer be separated, for unlike a marriage, which can be ended through divorce, the bonds of paternity cannot be undone.[223]

Samāʿ reframes the Nuṣayrī community as a male family. The student who has achieved *samāʿ* is not only the son of his *sayyid* but also the brother of his *sayyid* 's other students. He is the nephew of his *sayyid*'s brothers and the cousin of their students. Attaining *samāʿ* establishes the novice within the community by tying him laterally to other believers as though they were

[221] Ibid., 55.

[222] Ibid., 58.

[223] Ibid., 58-9.

consanguineal kin. But it also connects him to believers of the past, allowing him to trace his religious genealogy back to the founders of the sect. According to al-Ṭabarānī, a believer's genealogy is the "cord that connects to God" and it legitimizes his participation in the sacred rituals of the sect.[224] Before partaking of the *ʿabd al-nūr*, a believer must correctly recite his religious lineage. If he forgets a name in the chain, he is required to travel or write to someone who can remind him.[225.]

Correct memorization of one's lineage is the most important obligation of a new believer. Al-Ṭabarānī explains that if necessary, a student need not memorize all of the prayers in the *Dustūr*, the Nuṣayrī canon, but can simply be taught their meanings. Yet he must be able to correctly recite the names of his forebears in his religious pedigree.[226] A believer's religious lineage, including the date of his *samāʿ*, is inserted in the recitation of the fourth chapter of the *Dustūr* called *al-Nasab*, the pedigree. Since each believer's pedigree is unique, the chains of transmission recorded in the available versions of the Nuṣayrī canon are different. Nevertheless, they all eventually reach back to the founders of the sect (in reverse chronological order): al-Jillī, al-Khaṣībī, al-Junbulānī, Ibn Jundub, and finally Muḥammad Ibn Nuṣayr, the *bāb* (door) of the Imām al-Ḥasan al-Askarī and the man after whom the sect is named.[227] By reimagining the

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[224] Ibid., 60.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid., 106.

[227] There are currently three available copies of the Nuṣayrī canon. The earliest copy, referred to as the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, can be found in Sulaymān al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra,* 7-33 (translated in Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Noṣairīs*, 161-205). Since Sulaymān was born in 1250 / 1834 and began his initiation when he was eighteen years old, only receiving the canon around a year later, we can roughly date this version to 1269 /1852, at the latest. The second is only a partial copy and can be found in MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564, transcribed 1306 / 1889. Both of these have identical versions of the *surāt al-nasab,* called *al-nisbā* (*K. al-Bākūra*, 14-16 and MS Taymūr, 42-44), which is likely because they are based on a standardized lineage included in pedagogical manuals for students. (See Chapter Three for more on this.) The third available version of the canon, based on a manuscript from 1375 / 1955 is slightly different than the first two. It is called the *K. al-Dustūr*, and can be found in *Kutub al-ʿAlawīyīn al-muqaddasa* [Silsilat al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī 8], 12-28. The *K. al-Majmūʿ* and the *K. al-Dustūr* are essentially the same book. The

student as the son of his teacher, *samāʿ* confirms the initiate in his lineage, making access to its religious secrets his rightful inheritance.

Samāʿ marks the birth of the Nuṣayrī believer, but it is really only the beginning of his education. During the ceremony, the student gains access for the first time to the *Dustūr*, the Nuṣayrī canon, also known as the *Kitāb al-Majmūʿ*, and is instructed to 'listen' to his *sayyid* as he teaches him the religious secrets discussed within it. This is perhaps a second meaning behind the name of the ceremony. After the student has been confirmed through *samāʿ* he is allowed forty days to memorizes the *Dustūr* under the guidance of his *sayyid*. This length of time does not appear to have a life-cycle equivalent and is based instead on the amount of time it took Mūsā (Moses) to learn the *Tawrāt* (Torah). Al-Ṭabarānī cites Quran 7, 142, "We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed [the period] with ten [more]: thus was completed the term [of communion] with his Lord, forty nights" to justify this length of time.[228]

Before *samāʿ*, disclosing religious secrets to a student was analogous to engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman. It was regulated by the esoteric equivalents of the Islamic laws on the subject, and its stated intent was the successful insemination of the student-wife, who would conceive within himself a new believer. But once this believer has been born as a man through *samāʿ*, sharing religious secrets with him can no longer be equated to sex. Instead, it is reinterpreted and likened to *raḍāʿa,* breastfeeding an infant. The secret knowledge that had previously given him life now nurtures his development. And the person who feeds him this knowledge is likened to a mother who nourishes him with her milk. Thus when he teaches his

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Shamālī sect, to which Sulaymān al-Adhanī belonged, called it the *Majmūʿ,'* but it is referred to as the *Dustūr* in the works of al-Ṭabarānī. Oddly, the lineage in Sulaymān's version of the *surāt al-nasab* is longer; including thirty-one names in the chain while the later AH 1375 version only includes twenty-six names. Also interesting is the fact that al-Jillī is the first name that the two versions have in common. Neither chain goes through al-Ṭabarānī who was the student of al-Jillī, and the person who would logically be the next link in the chain.

[228] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*,105.

student the *Dustūr*, the role of the *sayyid* evolves again. He is no longer merely the student's husband and father; he now also becomes his mother.

Considering the explicit misogyny of the sect, the graduation of the initiate from the lower discursive category of women to that of men makes sense, as it represents his spiritual progression on his path towards becoming a believer. But the master's corresponding gender switch, his becoming a mother who breastfeeds her son, is quite surprising. In this case it does not signify a degradation in the status of the *sayyid*. Instead it is a celebration of the reproductive and nurturing powers of the feminine that are appropriated by the *sayyid* as he creates and sustain new religious life.

Just as in the natural world where a wet-nurse might be employed to breastfeed a child if the mother does not produce sufficient milk, another believer can be employed to educate the initiate if his own *sayyid* is not qualified for the task. Religious knowledge is no longer equated to sex, which can only be shared within an exclusive relationship, but rather to food, which can be given freely. Therefore, the *sayyid* with whom the student had contracted *taʿlīq* and *samāʿ* does not have to be the one with whom he continues his education. Al-Ṭabarānī writes that if a person is illiterate and knows only the word of unity, he may still initiate a student, but he should hand him over to someone else who can "breastfeed" him. This authorization comes from Quran 2, 233 where it says, "there is no blame on you if you entrust your children to a wet-nurse provided that you pay what is due from you in kindness."[229]

The period of breastfeeding can end after the memorization of the *Dustūr* with a ceremony called *najwā,* meaning secret conversation. During *najwā*, the initiate is again entrusted with the most-high word, thereby solidifying his full membership in the sect. At this

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[229] Quran 2, 233.

point it becomes unlawful to hide religious secrets from him, whether or not he asks to be told about them.[230] He is now considered an equal in religion and can no longer be cut off from the Nuṣayrī community or excluded from participation in its rituals.[231] Having achieved *najwā*, the new believer is saved and is promised that he will not have to suffer the tribulations of degrading reincarnations (*musūkhiyyāt*) to which non-believers are subject after death.[232]

For many believers, *najwā* concludes their education. Alternatively, the breast-feeding stage can continue for up to two years, based on Quran 2, 233 which states, "The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years."[233] This longer period of *raḍāʿa*, also called *tafaqquh*, meaning to study jurisprudence, is intended to teach the initiate the intricacies of Nuṣayrī law, and is necessary if the student ever wants to contract a *taʿlīq* of his own.[234] But before he can do so he must take into consideration the bonds that had been formed during the various stages of his initiation, as these effect the choice of people he can take on as his own students. Having been a wife in the relationship of *taʿlīq* does not place restrictions on who he can initiate because women do not have agency in marriage. It does however, place restrictions on the *sayyid* to whom he was attached. Some of these, including the prohibition of contracting *taʿlīq* with two biological brothers and with a biological father and son, were described above. But achieving *samāʿ* and studying the *Dustūr* do activate forbidden relations, which the student must avoid when contracting his own *taʿlīq*. As described above, *samāʿ* and *raḍāʿa* establish blood kinship between the student and his *sayyid* and milk kinship between the student and the

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[230] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 56.

[231] Ibid., 77.

[232] Ibid., 55.

[233] Ibid., 51, 56.

[234] Ibid., 51.

one who taught him the law. Contracting *taʿlīq* with anyone who shares that kinship is thus considered incest and is not allowed.

In Islamic law the forbidden degrees of marriage resulting from blood or milk kinship are set out in Quran 4, 22-3 and include father's wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, nieces, milk-mothers, and milk-sisters.[235] All of these have their counterparts in the Nuṣayrī laws of initiation, although some of them require quite imaginative reinterpretation in order to find their esoteric equivalents. For example, the esoteric equivalent of marrying one's father's wife is explained by al-Ṭabarānī as follows: if a teacher had contracted *taʿlīq* with two students but had passed away after progressing to *samāʿ* with only one of them, the more advanced student cannot contract *taʿlīq* with the other. This is because the one who had achieved *samāʿ* had become his teacher's son while the less advanced student remained his wife, so contracting *taʿlīq* with him would violate the prohibition of marrying his father's wife.[236]

The law against marrying one's mother is interpreted by al-Ṭabarānī as forbidding *taʿlīq* with one's teacher. But why would the *sayyid* who introduced the novice to the religion in the first place ever need to be taken on as a student through *taʿlīq*? Al-Ṭabarānī explains that if the *sayyid* forgot the *Dustūr* after having taught it to his student, he must be reinitiated from the very beginning. But it is not permissible for his former student to be the one to contract *taʿlīq* with him as that would be like marrying his mother.[237] The same logic follows for reinitiating the

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[235] Those relationships resulting from marriage, namely, those with mothers-in-law, stepdaughters, daughters-in-law, and two simultaneous sisters found in Quran 4, 23 were described above.

[236] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 58-9.

[237] Ibid., 65. If a person needs to be reinitiated as a result of having forgotten the *Dustūr*, he must progress through all of the stages of initiation, but can advance through them in one night. The way this is accomplished is that the night is divided into three parts, one for *sharb al-sār*, one for *taʿlīq*, and one for *samāʿ*; a stage of initiation is performed in each (ibid., 53).

teacher from whom one studied the *fiqh* as well as his other students, as they stand in the position of his milk-mother and milk-sisters, respectively.[238]

The preceding paragraphs have described perfect *bāṭinī* readings of the laws listed in Quran 4, 22-3 where marriage was rendered as *taʿlīq* and the forbidden degrees of consanguinity covered those people with whom the believer had affinity as a result of his spiritual rebirth and suckling. But just as in the case of *wuḍūʾ*, where literal aspects of Quranic law were brought untranslated into their Nuṣayrī legal equivalents, so literal elements of the Quranic laws of consanguinity were incorporated into the laws governing *taʿlīq*. Not only did Nuṣayrī law prohibit *taʿlīq* with 'real' (*ḥaqīqī*) relatives resulting from *samāʿ* and *raḍāʿa*, it also forbade *taʿlīq* with the 'biological' (*ṭabīʿī*) relations listed in the Quran. For example, the Quranic prohibition of marrying one's sister made it unlawful for a believer to reinitiate a student who had previously attained *samāʿ* from his own teacher; but it also prevented him from contracting *taʿlīq* with his biological brother, as that would also be like marrying a sister.[239] The same applied to initiating real and biological uncles and nephews, which would be like marrying aunts and nieces.[240]

The interweaving of the literal and allegorical, biological and real made the system polyvalent and extremely difficult to untangle. If a general rule can be abstracted from the lists of forbidden degrees found in the *K. al-Ḥāwī*, it is that *taʿlīq* is prohibited with one's own 'biological' relations as well as with those men who have become 'real' relatives as a result of *samāʿ* and *raḍāʿa*. But one may contract *taʿlīq* with the 'biological' kin of one's 'real' relatives.

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[238] Ibid., 66.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Ibid., 65.

For example, a man may contract *taʿlīq* with his *sayyid* 's biological son since he is not his brother by blood or through initiation.[241]

This changes once the believer has taken on the role of the husband in a *taʿlīq.* Once the believer has become a *sayyid* in his own right and taken on his own student as a wife, the biological relations of his student become forbidden to him in a subsequent *taʿlīq*, as that would violate the prohibition of marrying in-laws found in Quran 4, 23. For example, as mentioned above, a *sayyid* may not contract *taʿlīq* with his student's biological son. This is because that student had been his wife and contracting *taʿlīq* with his student's biological son would violate the prohibition of marrying a stepdaughter. So while the description of initiation in this chapter has followed the experience of the student, progressing first from the role of wife, to that of son, and finally husband, it is the actions of the teacher which impose the prohibitions arising from consanguinity. It is the *sayyid* who has agency, and it is his giving birth to his student and then nourishing him with religious secrets which imposes the first layers of restrictions. Only once the believer has become a *sayyid* in his own right and contracted his own spiritual marriage is the final layer of restrictions added.

The prohibitions of consanguinity resulting from initiation serve to highlight the manifold and intertwined rings of affinity that tie the Nuṣayrī community together with bonds of blood and religion. However, it is important to emphasize that these bonds govern the esoteric world of religion and do not influence the exoteric world. Believers related through initiation are connected only in the religious sense that prevents them from consanguineous *taʿlīq*. Their spiritual kinship does not influence the choice of women they can take in an exoteric, sexual marriage. As mentioned above, women are absolutely excluded from the religious community

[241] Ibid., 66.

and they do not become relatives as a result of the initiation of their fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons. For example, becoming the spiritual son of a *sayyid* does not prevent a man from marrying his *sayyid* 's biological daughter since, as al-Ṭabarānī explains, "she did not become his sister in the biological world nor in the 'true' reality."[242] In fact, al-Ṭabarānī gives the example of Mūsā (Moses) who married the daughter of his teacher, Shuʿayb (Jethro) to emphasize the fact that initiation only prevents a man from contracting *taʿlīq* with his teacher's male students. It does not prevent him from marrying his teacher's biological daughters.[243]

According to the same reasoning, a teacher may marry his student's divorced or widowed wife since she did not become his daughter-in-law as a result of his having spiritually fathered her husband. The Quranic prohibition of marrying one's son's wife prevents a man from contracting a *taʿlīq* with the student of his student and not from marrying his student's wife. According to al-Ṭabarānī, the marriage of Muḥammad to the wife of Zayd b. Ḥāritha illustrates this law.[244] Zayd was the adoptive son of the Prophet Muḥammad and the fact that Muḥammad married the wife of Zayd has traditionally been linked to the fact that Islam does not acknowledge adoption, or rather, that adoption does not create consanguinity and therefore marrying the wife of Zayd did not violate the prohibition of marrying a daughter-in-law found in Quran 4, 23.[245] Al-Ṭabarānī instead employs the story in the context of *taʿlīq* to show how a

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[242] Ibid., 57.

[243] This has been misunderstood by previous scholars writing about Nuṣayrī initiation. In *Extreme Shiites*, 374-5, Moosa writes that a student may not marry his teacher's biological daughter as she is considered to be his sister. But as Ṭabarānī clarifies, statement to this effect found in Nuṣayrī works mean that a man may not contract *taʿlīq* with his *sayyid*'s other students, and not that he is prevented from marrying his *sayyid*'s daughter.

[244] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 58.

[245] See Quran 7, 37: "When Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to thee in marriage, so that [in future] no blame should attach to the believers for [marrying] the spouses of their adopted children when the latter have come to the end of their union with them."

teacher-student relationship does not have an effect on the choice of women that one can marry, as initiation only creates consanguinity between men.

After all, the Nuṣayrīs are a community composed entirely of men. Excluding women is exactly what makes the analogy to marriage and birth so productive, as it allows believers to appropriate all heterosexual roles of husband, wife, father, mother, nurse, and child. If the bonds between these roles are the most sacred a person can have in the biological world, then structuring initiation upon them reinforces the sacrality of the community and its beliefs which like sperm, blood, and milk, are only shared with family. Furthermore, by acting as both the males and females of his religious world, a Nuṣayrī believer is able to become a complete, spiritually hermaphroditic person who has been receptive as a wife, authoritative as a husband, creative as a father, and nurturing as a mother or nursemaid. Through initiation, the Nuṣayrī subject becomes the *insān al-kāmil* (the complete man) who has been elevated from his mundane bodily existence and become a member of the saved community.

By employing a *bāṭinī taʾwīl* to their reading of the Quran, the founders of the Nuṣayrī religion were able to create a law that was at the same time sectarian and thoroughly Islamic. By equating the study of religious truths with sexual intercourse they encouraged members to jealously keep their doctrines from non-initiates in the same way that a good Muslim might guard his chastity. Not only did the comparison provide the structure for initiation, it allowed the sect to cohere through imagined bonds of marriage and consanguinity and to solidify sectarian lines against the outside word. Transposing Islamic marital laws onto the context of Nuṣayrī initiation enabled the believers to feel as though they were the true Muslims and gave Quranic legitimation to dogmas and rituals which others considered antithetical to Islam. But mostly, it highlighted the transcendent nature of religious knowledge which when shared between two

people had the power not only to create a life but to give birth to an entire community of believers.

Understanding how this community actually functioned throughout history, how their theoretical schema of relationships actually played out in society, and the social loads that were actually carried by these bonds is a job for the future of the field. But until such a time when the veils of secrecy will be sufficiently lifted as to allow an ethnographic study of the Nuṣayrī community, we are grateful to the Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifa for making possible this fascinating glimpse into the literature of this intriguing and understudied Islamic sect.

Part II: Sources and Stage Directions

Practical Discussions of Initiation from the Twelfth to Fourteenth/Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries

Chapter Three: Discovering the Tools of Initiation

Manuals, Catechisms, and Teaching Aids

Initiation separates those who are entrusted the secret of the religion from those from whom the secret must be kept. Obviously, the larger the number of novices inducted into the religion, the more vulnerable the secret becomes. Initiation is therefore the moment of greatest threat to the integrity of the Nuṣayrī religion. It is the point where the young and unproven are awarded the ultimate confidence and entrusted knowledge considered too weighty for all but the most proven of believers. This is why initiation into the sect is conducted gradually. The length of time ensures that those who do not display a commitment to silence are identified and eliminated before it is too late. It is also probably why initiation is governed by such a complex system of laws. The restrictions of consanguinity make it difficult for relatives to initiate each other and guarantees that each student is chosen on his own merit and not merely admitted to the religion because of his affinity to another believer.

The various ceremonies which make up Nuṣayrī initiation are structured in such a way that they impress upon the novice the gravity of the charge he is being given. The previous chapter focused on the ways in which this was accomplished conceptually by identifying the transmission of religious secrets with sexual intercourse and by reimagining the community of initiates as a family. But the need for silence was not only stressed on a theoretical plane; the rites, physical postures, invocations, and oaths that made up the initiation ceremonies were planned with this objective in mind. In the next chapter, these rituals and the ways in which they promoted the Nuṣayrī culture of secrecy will be described. Since initiation was practically the first introduction a novice received to the secrets of his religion, analyzing the ways in which initiation was conducted will help us understand how Nuṣayrīs traversed this dangerous breach

in the secrecy of their sect, imparting religious knowledge to the next generation while ensuring that it stayed protected from the outside world.

In the *K. al-Ḥāwī* al-Ṭabarānī lays out the theoretical framework for Nuṣayrī initiation. He explains its esoteric meanings, legal foundations, and the social and religious obligations that accompany proper entrance into the elite circles of the sect. However, except for inadvertent statements interspersed throughout his discussion, al-Ṭabarānī does not spell out in detail how the various initiatory rites are to be conducted. Luckily, there are other, albeit later, descriptions of Nuṣayrī initiation from which a more detailed and holistic account of the initiatory ceremonies can be obtained. It is to these later texts that I would like to draw our attention in this portion of the dissertation. The objective of this exercise is not to describe every variant in the accounts of the Nuṣayrī initiation. A quick survey of the sources reveals that there are many differences, some of which are significant and deserve mention. However, my analysis will mainly focus on those elements that the accounts hold in common. The purpose of this endeavor is to reconstruct a core Nuṣayrī tradition of initiation so that the significance of the various elements can be explored.

Sharḥ al-Imām **(Ms. Paris, arabe 1450, fols. 155a-167a)**

The earliest text to spell out the rites of Nuṣayrī initiation is the anonymous *Sharḥ al-imām wa-mā yūjab ʿalayhī* (an explanatory tract on the imam and his duties) found in Ms. Paris, arabe 1450, fols. 155a-167a.[246] The copyist of this manuscript, who identifies himself as Aḥsan Manṣūr Khalīl Maḥrizī, transcribed the document in 1211/1796. As mentioned in the previous

[246] This manuscript has not been published but is quoted extensively in Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairīs*, 106-13; Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis*, 303-9; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 372-77; al-Ḥarīrī, *al-ʿAlawiyūn al-nuṣayriyūn*, 85-92.

chapter, the manuscript includes long quotations and paraphrases of the *K. al-Ḥāwī*, which suggests a much earlier origin to the text and indicates that many of the ideas, if not the text itself, come from al-Ṭabarānī. As its title would imply, the *Sharḥ al-imām* is primarily an instructional guide for the shaykh conducting the initiation ceremony. In it directions for the proper management of the initiatory rites of *taʿlīq* and *samāʿ* are expounded with parenthetical excursions on the theoretical framework of initiation qua marriage derived from the *K. al-Ḥāwī*. The *Sharḥ al-imām* is therefore something in between an instructional manual and a strictly intellectual text and is the most explicit connection between the theoretical framework explained in the previous chapter and the descriptive accounts which will be the focus of the next chapter.

A unique feature of the *Sharḥ al-imām* is its reticence with regards to any secret Nuṣayrī doctrines. In no place does it refer to the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib nor does it ever mention the sacred word *ʿa-m-s* which is standard in the *K. al-Ḥāwī* and central to all the other accounts of initiation. The sermons included in the *Sharḥ al-imām*, which are meant to be read at the various ceremonies, are disjointed and cryptic, requiring a deeper understanding of the *ʿilm al-bāṭin* than the student could possibly have at the early stages of his initiation. The student is made to swear that he will adhere to all Islamic precepts such as fasting on Ramadan and conducting Hajj and is never given any indication that these might have non-literal applications. In fact, the only aspect of the ceremonies that betrays any unorthodoxy is the sacred wine that the initiate is given to drink as part of his induction. It appears that the *Sharḥ al-imām* was specifically crafted according to the requirements of *taqiyya* and *kitmān al-sirr* so that the novice does not gain access to the secrets of the sect until he has been fully initiated.[247]

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[247] But once the student has been initiated into the sect he immediately begins to learn these religious secrets. The *Sharḥ al-imām* includes instructions that that after the student has given his official oath of secrecy at the conclusion of the *samāʿ* ceremony the *fatḥ* (victory) should be read. See MS Arabe 1450, (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale), 166b. The *fatḥ* is the fifth chapter of the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, the Nuṣayrī canon also called the *Dustūr*, which is given to

Samuel Lyde's Lost *K. al-Mashyakha* (MS Cambridge 1422 Jesus, No. 17)

The next available account of initiation is that found in the *Kitāb al-Mashyakha* (Manual For Shaykhs), excerpts of which were published in 1860 in Samuel Lyde's *The Asian Mystery*, which was the first book-length monograph written on the Nuṣayrī religion.[248] The manuscript that had been in Lyde's possession was roughly contemporary to when the *Sharḥ al-imām* was copied, having been transcribed in 1239/1824. We know from Lyde's description of his manuscript that that content of the *K. al-Mashyakha* was not limited to initiation, but covered many topics relating to the ordering of Nuṣayrī rituals. In fact, the chapters on initiation were not an integral part of the *K. al-Mashyakha*, but were appended by the copyist to his particular edition of the text.

Although Lyde provided copious extracts of the *K. al-Mashyakha* in his book, the actual manuscript from which he quoted has been presumed to be missing for the last one hundred and fifty-two years. When I began writing this chapter two years ago, I was only able to quote from the English excerpts of this text supplied by Lyde. However, I have since been able to locate Lyde's lost manuscript as well as several other copies of this work. These discoveries have led me to believe that the *K. al-Mashyakha* that had been in Lyde's possession played quite an influential role in the development of nineteenth century Nuṣayrī religious literature, particularly those texts relating to initiation. For this reason, I would like to digress from my summary of

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the student to memorize once he has been inducted into the sect. The contents of the chapter are not described in the *Sharḥ al-imām* but from the available versions of the *Majmūʿ* we know that the *fatḥ* contains explicit references to the divinity of ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Fārisī. The recitation of this chapter is therefore the first time that the student is exposed the mystery of *ʿa-m-s*. The fact that the transmission of this secret is not spelled out but only alluded to with the instructions to recite the *fatḥ* should also be understood as a corollary of the same secretiveness that informs the entire text.

[248] Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, 256-64.

sources and explain the provenance of this text, its rediscovery, and the reasons that I believe it to have been influential in the development of Nuṣayrī initiation literature.

The *K. al-Mashyakha* in Lyde's possession was quite distinctive. From the descriptions Lyde provided in his *Asian Mystery* we know that it consisted of 188 pages 12mo and was divided into thirty-two chapters.[249] We know that although Lyde called his entire manuscript the *K. al-Mashyakha*, the document in fact comprised an original book bearing this title and three further texts, likely appended by the copyist. These additional texts were written by the same copyist, but in a worse hand, and in his closing remarks he excused himself for this, blaming the poor quality of his ink. The *K. al-Mashyakha* proper was a prayer manual. Of the appended texts, the first two related to initiation and the third was a sermon on the proper behavior of believers during religious gatherings.

Reflecting this division in the manuscript between the *K. al-Mashyakha* on the one hand and the appended texts on the other, the copyist had written three colophons, one at the conclusion of the *K. al-Mashyakha,* another after the appended texts on initiation, and then some final closing remarks after the sermon. In the first colophon that concluded the *K. al-Mashyakha*, the copyist, a certain Shaykh Muḥammad of Bishrāghī, provided his lineage and the date and occasion of the manuscript's transcription, which Lyde reports was the initiation of his nephew ʿAlī b. ʿĪd in 1239/1824.[250] In the second colophon the copyist attributed the appended texts on initiation to a Shaykh Ḥasan b. Ramaḍān and then repeated that the occasion for its transcription was the initiation of ʿAlī b. ʿĪd.[251] One can assume that it was this milestone in his relative's life

[249] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 233.

[250] Ibid., 233, 256, 264. Lyde's statement of the relationship between the scribe and novice is erroneous, as will be explained below.

[251] Ibid., 264.

that led the copyist Muḥammad of Bishrāghī to append the chapters on initiation to the original text of the *K. al-Mashyakha.* In the concluding remarks following the sermon, the copyist repeated the occasion of transcription and apologized for the bad handwriting in which the manuscript was written, blaming it on the poor quality of the ink.[252]

Lyde was not the first scholar to inspect the *K. al-Mashyakha.* Earlier mention of it appeared in the July 1848 issue of the *Journal Asiatique* in letter written by the Syrian Christian Joseph Catafago on June 26, 1848. At the time Catafago was employed as the official interpreter of the Prussian consulate in Beirut but had acquired a reputation amongst European Orientalists by publishing notices from time to time in the scholarly periodicals of new Nuṣayrī manuscripts that had come into his possession. In fact, only a few months earlier, in February 1848, Catafago had published the first description of al-Ṭabarānī's *Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād* (Collection of Feasts), which to this day is considered one of the most important Nuṣayrī treatises to have been brought to light.[253] Amid the celebration over his article Catafago wrote a short letter in which he thanked his learned colleagues for their response to his discovery and then described another work he had found which he claimed was "no less interesting than the *Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād*" and which he intended to translate and publish forthwith.[254] The title of the work was *K. al-Mashyakha* and from his list of the subject headings it is clear that it contained the same subject matter as the

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[252] Ibid., 233, 264.

[253] Joseph Catafago, "Notice sur les Ansériens," *Journal Asiatique* February(1848): 149-68. Catafago only published the table of contents and some extracts from the *Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād* in this article. A critical edition of the full text was first printed a century later in Rudolph Strothmann, "Festkalender der Nusairer," *Der Islam*, no. 27 (1944-1946). In 2006 the Lebanese press, Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa, came out with a new edition of the *Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād* in a volume dedicated to the works of al-Ṭabarānī. See Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā, eds., *Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-ʻAlawiyya*, Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī (Diyār 'Aql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Maʻrifa, 2006), 207-412. A chapter analyzing the antinomian elements of the *Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād* titled "The Nuṣayrī Calendar: Allegorical and Antinomian Interpretation of Muslim Festivals" can be found in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʻAlawī Religion*, 111-51.

[254] Joseph Catafago, "Lettre de M. Catafago," *Journal Asiatique* July(1848): 72-8.

book later known to Samuel Lyde. Catafago never got around to publishing his intended translation of the *K. al-Mashyakha* and did not include the book in his 1876 bibliography of Nuṣayrī texts.[255]

Twelve years later, in 1860, the *K. al-Mashyakha* resurfaced in Samuel Lyde's *Asian Mystery*, which, as mentioned above, was the first book-length monograph to be written about the Nuṣayrīs. Of all the European scholars to write about the Nuṣayrīs, Samuel Lyde had perhaps the greatest firsthand experience with the sect. From 1852 to his death in 1860 he served as the first Anglican missionary to the Nuṣayrīs. As the only European to live among them, he was uniquely well placed to study the community from within. It was his hope to eventually write a scholarly monograph on their religious beliefs based on a large collection of original manuscripts that would do "for the Ansaireeh what De Sacy has already effected for [our understanding] of the Druses."[256] Unfortunately, his worsening health forced him to downscale his ambition. Knowing that he did not have long to live, he began to write his book after having personally examined only one original Nuṣayrī manuscript, the *K. al-Mashyakha*, which along with his personal experiences among the sect, oral reports from Nuṣayrī acquaintances, and the few articles available at the time, comprised the entirety of his information on the Nuṣayrī religion.

In the preface to his *Asian Mystery* Lyde writes that he had acquired his copy of the *K. al-Mashyakha* "from a Christian merchant in Ladikeeh for the sum of £10, having come into his

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[255] Idem, "Nouvelles Mélanges," *Journal Asiatique* July (1876): 523-5. Although this article has been used as a catalogue of all available Nuṣayrī works, it was not actually intended as such. It was merely a description of a particular collection Catafago had occasion to examine on a recent trip to Syria. Catafago describes it as "a collection, the likes of which does not exist in any part of the world" which includes "almost all of the rare and little-known books of the Nuṣayrī religion." This particular collection apparently lacked a *K. al-Mashyakha*, which is why this title was excluded from the list.

[256] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: v. The work referred to is Antione Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des druzes, tiré des livres religieux de cette secte, et précédé d'une introduction et de la Vie du khalife Hakem-biamr-Allah*, II vols. (Paris: L'Imprimerie royale, 1838).

hands during the troublesome times of Ibrahim Pasha, when the Ansaireeh were driven from their homes."[257] The unrest surrounding Ibrahim Pasha's invasion of Syria occurred in the 1830's, and if the merchant's report is to be trusted, one must assume that the manuscript had been in the latter's position since then. How then was Catafago able to describe the manuscript in 1848? Lyde, who recognized the identity of his text with that previously described by Catafago, suggested that the self-same merchant might have lent the *K. al-Mashyakha* to Catafago, but that Catafago never actually owned the manuscript.[258] He could however have transcribed the manuscript, in fact, probably did, as we will later learn.

Lyde died in Alexandria on April 1, 1860 at the age of 35, just after completing his draft of the *Asian Mystery*. Time had not permitted him the opportunity to expand on his footnotes or to settle his affairs. It was only through the dedication of his brother that the book was published later that year in London by Longmans and Green and made available to the general public. For a long time, at least until 1900 when René Dussaud wrote his *Histoire et religion des Noṣairīs*, Lyde's work, and by extension, the *K. al-Mashyakha*, remained the main source of information on the Nuṣayrī religion. Unfortunately, no one knew what had become of Lyde's manuscript, and while generations of scholars acknowledged the importance of his text for elucidating the ways in which the secret Nuṣayrī rituals were conducted, the fact that only excerpts from the *K. al-Mashyakha* appeared to have been preserved, and these only in translation, precluded a proper analysis of the text. The loss of this manuscript has been lamented most recently in the works of Bar-Asher and Kofsky[259] and Yaron Friedman.[260]

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[257] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: vii.

[258] Ibid.

[259] Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʻAlawī Religion*: 165.

Yet Lyde's manuscript is still extant. It is available in the Old Library of Jesus College, Cambridge, where it has been housed since March 1, 1860. It seems that foreseeing his imminent demise, Lyde sent the manuscript, as well as several other Arabic texts, to Jesus College, Cambridge. In the 1922 *Supplementary Hand-List* of manuscripts held at Cambridge University, Lyde's *K. al-Mashyakha* is given the shelf mark MS Cambridge 1422 Jesus, No. 17 and described as "a 'Manual of Nusayri Shaykhs' bought in Sept. 1859 for £10 from a merchant of Latakia, and bequeathed to Jesus College by S. Lyde on March 1, 1860. It comprises 32 sections and 188pp. The substance of the book is incorporated in Lyde's *Asian Mystery*, Ch. ix, published in 1860 by Longmans and Green."[261]

It is not surprising that Lyde would have donated his manuscript to Jesus College. Before moving to Syria in 1852, his entire adult life had been spent at that institution. According to the *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Lyde was admitted to Jesus College at the age of 18 on April 9, 1842. He matriculated the following year, completing a BA in 1848, and an MA three years later, at which point he took holy orders, and was hired as a fellow of Jesus College in 1851.[262] It was only his worsening health that led him to seek employment in 1852 in the warmer clime of Syria, where he established his mission house and eventually acquired his manuscript. Lyde's affiliation with Jesus College has always been known. In fact, it is announced on the title page of

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[260]Yaron Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 271.

[261] Edward G. Brown, *A supplementary hand-list of the Muḥammadan manuscripts, including all those written in the Arabic character, preserved in the libraries of the University and colleges of Cambridge,* (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), 239. This information can also be found at the conclusion of the actual MS in a dedication inscription written by Samuel Lyde, which reads: "March 1, 1860. I bequeath this book to Jesus College Cambridge. –Samuel Lyde. Coll. Jesus Cantab: Socius." An anonymous notice follows this inscription: "M. Lyde died in Alexandria on the 1st April 1860. The substance of this manual is translated in M. Lyde's book entitled "the Asian Mystery" Chap IX." The page is not numbered but it would correspond to p. 190 in the MS.

[262] J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of all Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, from the Earliest Times to 1900, Part 2*, vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 243.

his *Asian Mystery* where he is styled "the Rev. Samuel Lyde, M.A.; fellow of Jesus College: Author of *The Ansyreeh and Ismaeleeh.*"[263] But nowhere in the book is it mentioned that he had sent his manuscript to his old college, which may be why no one thought to look there.

An examination of the manuscript reveals additional information regarding its provenance that Lyde did not mention. Significantly, it allows identification of some of the names associated with this manuscript. First among these is the novice in whose honor the *K. al-Mashyakha* was copied. Lyde had simply referred to him as ʿAlī b. ʿĪd, but in the manuscript his name is given in greater detail as ʿAlī b. al-shaykh ʿĪd b. al-shaykh Aḥmad.[264] From this fuller lineage, he is identifiable as the Nuṣayrī shaykh ʿAlī b. ʿĪd b. Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā, born in Bishrāghī, a town near Jablah in Latakia in 1217/1802.[265] His *nisba* is listed as Bishrāghī Maḥrizī, i.e. of the Maḥāriza, a Nuṣayrī clan living in the area of Sāfitā who claimed Hashimite descent through the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt.[266] According to an internal tradition, the Maḥāriza's name and royal pedigree derive from a certain Maḥriz al-Jayshī, a Fatimid amīr, said to be a grandson of the Caliph al- Muʿizz, who immigrated with his family to Syria in the

[263] This title refers to Lyde's travelogue of his original journey to Latakia in 1852. Samual Lyde, *The Ansyreeh and Ismaeleeh: a Visit to the Secret Sects of Northern Syria; with a View towards the Establishment of Schools* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853).

[264] MS Lyde 17, (Cambridge: Old Libray, Jesus College), 106.

[265] Dīb ʿAlī Ḥasan, *Aʿlām min al-madhhab al-jaʿfarī al-ʿalawī*, (Damascus: Dār Manāf, 1997), I: 75, 77, 106. This birth-date would have made him twenty-two, which is quite old, at his initiation in 1239/1824, when the *K. al-Mashyakha* was copied. Initiation generally occurs between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. I wonder if the *rasm* referred to in the manuscript is not initiation but a more advanced ceremony celebrating a man's consecration as a shaykh. I have not found any descriptions of such a ceremony but it would explain both the advanced age of the novice and the transcription of a *K. al-Mashyakha* for the occasion. It is intended for shaykhs and certainly would not have been presented to a newly initiated youth.

[266] See Muḥammad Ghālib al-Ṭawīl, *Tārīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*, second ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1966), 410, 430-3. See Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints*, 53. Note that the Maḥāriza is also the clan name of the copyist of the *Sharḥ al-imām*, Aḥsan Manṣūr Khalīl Maḥrizī.

fourth/tenth century.[267] The Bashārigha, to whom our novice belonged, were a lineage within this clan based in Bishrāghī.

Fortuitously, there is quite a large amount of information about the Maḥāriza, and particularly of the family of ʿAlī b. ʿĪd around the time that the *K. al-Mashyakha* was copied. This is because of the existence of a rare biographical dictionary, the *K. al-Nasab*, written by Yūsuf b. ʿAlī al-Aʿraj (b.1275/1858) of a related Nuṣayrī family.[268] Yūsuf, who was orphaned as a child, came to Bishrāghī at the age of seventeen to live with and probably be initiated by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd the son of ʿAlī b. ʿĪd.[269] In his *K. al-Nasab*, Yūsuf al-Aʿrāj pays particular attention to the family of his shaykh, which is why any details of the life of this provincial figure have survived.

An inspection of MS Lyde 17 also reveals additional information about the scribe Muḥammad of Bishrāghī. In the manuscript his full name is given as "Muḥammad b. al-shaykh [sic] b. al-shaykh Jābir b. al-shaykh Jumʿa from the town of the people of Bishrāghī al-Jirāna who is descended from the shaykh Farrās al-Ḥammām (the Lion of al-Ḥammām)."[270] The expression *ibn al-shaykh* is written twice in a row which can either be understood as an accidental repetition, in which case the scribe's name is simply Muḥammad b. Jābir b. Jumʿa, or

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[267] See ʿĪsā Abū ʿAlūsh, *Ṣafaḥāt majhūla min thawrat al-shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAlī* (al-Lādhiqiyya: Dār Dhū al-Fiqār lil-Ṭibāʿa wa-al-Nashr waʾl-Tawzīʿ, 2006), 14; Elsewhere the one to emigrate from Egypt is Muḥriz's son, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥriz al-Jayshī. See Kāmil 'Alī Ibrāhīm Bayṣīn, *Ḥaqāiʾq al-tabyīn fī nasab al-muslimīn al-ʿalawiyyīn* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Balāgh lil-Ṭibāʿa waʾl-Nashr waʾl-Tawzīʿ, 2006), 225-8. For an analysis of the (likely spurious) Maḥrizī claim to Fatimid descent see Dīb ʿAlī Ḥasan, *Aʿlām min al-madhhab al-jaʿfarī al-ʿalawī*, vol. 2 (Damacus: Dār al-sāḥil li-l-turāth, 1998), 56-9. Another derivation for the name of the Maḥāriza clan from a certain Maḥriz b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī can be found in some of the entries in Dīb ʿAlī Ḥasan's biographical dictionary, including that of ʿAlī b. Īd. (Ḥasan, *Aʿlām*, 1: 75.) I have not been able to identify this man and wonder if the inclusion of the name might be an attempt to bolster the Islamic legitimacy of the sect by tracing their origin to the *Anṣār*.

[268] This work is not published but is the major source of information for Dīb ʿAlī Ḥasan's *Aʿlām.*

[269] Ḥasan, *Aʿlām*, 1: 105-6.

[270] MS Lyde 17: 156.

as an accidental omission of the father's name from the lineage. The latter is the case, for in Yūsuf al-Aʿrāj's *K. al-Nasab* there is mention of a certain Jumʿa b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Jābir b. Jumʿa who was born in Bishrāghī in 1220/1805 and who is thus likely to be the copyist's son.[271] Moreover, this Jumʿa is reported to descend from the shaykh Farrās al-Jirāna (the Lion of al-Jirāna), and our copyist Muḥammad of Bishrāghī, traced his lineage in the manuscript to the shaykh Farrās al-Ḥammām. Al-Ḥammām and al-Jirāna are the same location, the present day Ḥammām al-Qarāḥila, a town adjacent to Bishrāghī.[272] The fact that both men claim descent from this shaykh confirms their relationship and allows us to definitively state that the scribe's name was Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, even though this patronymic does not appear in the manuscript.

In terms of the relationship between the scribe and novice, it should be noted that according to the manuscript ʿAlī b. ʿĪd was not the nephew of Muḥammad of Bishraghī, as Lyde claimed, but rather his paternal cousin. The terms used in the manuscript are *ibn ʿamm* and *walad ʿamm*, which literally mean son of the paternal uncle, or paternal cousin.[273] It is not clear why Lyde chose to translate the term as nephew, especially considering that he translated it as cousin in the case of author of the chapters on initiation, the Shaykh Ḥasan b. Ramaḍān, whom the scribe describes as *ibn al-ʿamm al-ʿazīz*, the dear paternal cousin.[274]

From their lineages, we know that the scribe and novice were not biological first cousins but may have been more distant relatives. Alternatively, Muḥammad of Bishrāghī may simply have used the expression *ibn ʿamm* as a figurative endearment for friend or coreligionist. One

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[271] Ḥasan, *Aʿlām*, I: 38.

[272] In fact, this town is often referred to by both names as al-Ḥammām al-Jirāna. See ibid., 27, 38, 63, 80, 104. See also al-Ṭawīl, *Tārīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*: 529. In one instance this shaykh is referred to by both names as Farrās al-Ḥammām al-Jirāna. See Ḥasan, *Aʿlām*, I: 104.

[273] MS Lyde 17: 178, 188.

[274] Ibid., 178.

might also suggest that the term was employed here in its technical sense relating to Nuṣayrī initiation. In nineteenth century Nuṣayrī literature the initiating shaykh in the master-disciple relationship was often called a ʿ*amm*.[275] So it is possible that when Muḥammad of Bishrāghī wrote that he transcribed the *K. al-Mashyakha* in honor of the consecration of his *ibn al-ʿamm* ʿAlī b. ʿĪd, he meant that he copied it in honor of the initiation of his own master's son. Further biographical information for these men will be required to settle this ambiguity.

The last point relating to the provenance of the *K. al-Mashyakha* that Lyde did not mention is that there is a short note written on one of the blank leaves following the manuscript.[276] Due to its colloquialisms and scrawling script, the note is very hard to read but likely contains important information relating to the history of the text. The legible portions refer to a ceremony attended by an uncle 'Īd (possibly the father of the novice 'Alī b. 'Īd) with pledges made to the saint al-Khiḍr witnessed by one Muhannā b. ʿAbūd and one ʿAjīb b. Ayyūb. The handwriting of the note differs from that of Muḥammad of Bishrāghī and is signed by the son of a certain Jaḥjāḥ Ismāʿīl who claims to have inspected the manuscript. This could be a presentation inscription commemorating the occasion of the gifting of the book but it is difficult to say whether it is for the initial presentation or some later transfer of the ownership of the text.

The Problem of MS Manchester 124 [722]

The story of Lyde's manuscript, so neatly resolved by the notice in the Cambridge catalogue, does not end there however, for if before we had a missing manuscript, now we have

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[275] See, for example, Sulayman al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 2,7. trans. in Salisbury, "The Book of Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 229, 233.

[276] The page is not numbered but would correspond to MS Lyde 17: 190.

two extant ones: there is a second copy of Muḥammad of Bishrāghī's *K. al-Mashyakha* in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, where it has been housed since 1901. This manuscript was examined by scholars in the field but has never been positively identified with Lyde's lost text. In the 1934 catalogue of Arabic manuscripts at the John Rylands Library it is labeled MS 124 and given the provisional title "The Liturgy and Prayer book of the Nuṣairīs."[277] The description is extremely detailed and even includes the Arabic text of the colophon which says, in accordance with Lyde's own introduction, that the *Mashyakha* was completed in 1239/1823 by Muḥammad of Bishrāghī in honor of the initiation of ʿAlī b. ʿĪd. The same texts are appended along with the closing remarks in which the copyist credits his chapters on initiation to the teachings of Ḥasan b. Ramaḍān and blames his bad handwriting on the quality of his ink. The colophon, closing remarks, and subject headings suffice to identify MS 124 as identical to that in Lyde's possession. In fact, had I not discovered Lyde's manuscript in Jesus College Cambridge I would simply have presumed this document to be Lyde's lost text.

How are we to account for this copy? A book of the significance of the *K. al-Mashyakha* might well have existed in several copies, but the fact that Jesus 17 and Manchester 124 have identical colophons is strange. In theory, colophons are unique. They are the personal autographs in which the copyist provides his name and the completion date of his particular transcription. How then did these two copies come to have the same colophon? Which of the two manuscripts is the original? And how did Manchester 124 also manage to make it to Great Britain and elude recognition as the lost *K. al-Mashyakha*?

The answer to the question of their relative chronology emerges from a comparison of the two texts. While internally identical, the Cambridge and Manchester manuscripts display several

[277] A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), 202-4.

extrinsic differences. The most obvious is that the Manchester manuscript is written with fifteen lines per page while Lyde's has only eleven, so that Lyde's text has many more pages than Manchester 124: 94 fols (188pp) as opposed to the 62 fols of the Manchester text. In Lyde's manuscript, moreover, each appended text begins on a new page, whereas in the Manchester MS one proceeds directly into the other. Both features could reflect a desire to save paper but the second could also indicate that Lyde 17 was the original in which each appendix was still seen as a distinct text, while in Manchester 124 the entire content was already perceived as a uniform body of literature. Another telling difference is that Manchester 124 includes an Arabic table of contents that is absent from the Cambridge manuscript.[278] Lyde wrote his own English table of contents at the conclusion of his text, but he did not have an Arabic one to work with.[279] The lack of an Arabic table of contents reinforces the suspicion that Lyde's manuscript is the earlier, less developed, text.

The handwritings of the two manuscripts are not identical but they are quite similar, both being written in a clear Syrian Nashkhī script. As Lyde pointed out, in the Cambridge manuscript this script worsens in the last appended text and the copyist apologizes for the change with reference to the poor quality of his ink.[280] In Manchester 124 the handwriting remains pretty much the same throughout. However, in the paragraph containing the apology the handwriting suddenly worsens and remains obviously bad for the remainder of the manuscript.[281] It is as if the copyist of the Manchester manuscript, reading the apology for the poor penmanship in the original, sought to make the statement apply to his copy as well!

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[278] Arabic MS 124 [722], (Manchester: John Rylands Library), 61b-63b.

[279] The pages are not numbered but would correspond to MS Lyde 17: 191-97.

[280] Ibid., 188.

[281] Arabic MS 124 [722]: 61a.

While none of these differences are conclusive on their own, together they suggest that Lyde's text was the earlier of the two. But the most telling indication that Manchester 124 was a later copy is that the scribe's lineage in the colophon is written as Muḥammad b. al-shaykh Jābir b. al-shaykh Jumʿa.[282] As noted above, Lyde's text had an additional *ibn al-shaykh* due to the scribe's omission of his father's name from the lineage.[283] Whoever copied the Manchester MS from the original clearly assumed that the second *ibn al-shaykh* in the name was superfluous and left it out.

Who might this copyist have been? One suggestion emerges from an examination of the text's arrival at the University of Manchester. Before coming to the John Rylands Library the manuscript was part of the Bibliotheca Lindesiana, a private collection of rare books and manuscripts compiled by the British Earls of Crawford. In its time, the Bibliotheca Lindesiana was one of the most important private libraries in Britain. It was begun in the late sixteenth century and was expanded in the nineteenth century by James Ludovic Lindsay, the 26th Earl of Crawford, exactly at the time when interest in Nuṣayrism first began. In 1901 this entire collection, including the *K. al-Mashyakha,* was sold to the John Rylands Library in Manchester, where it has remained to this day.

An examination of the 1898 catalogue of Oriental manuscripts in the Bibliotheca Lindesiana reveals that while the *K. al-Mashyakha* was indeed owned by Lord Lindsay, it was incorrectly identified as an Ismāʿīlī manuscript, which may be why scholars interested in Nuṣayrism never thought to examine it.[284] It was labeled MS 722 and given the descriptive title

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[282] Ibid., 49a.

[283] MS Lyde 17: 156.

[284] James Ludovic Lindsay Earl of Crawford and Michael Kerney, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana: Hand-List of Oriental Manuscripts. Arabic. Persian. Turkish* (Aberdeen: Priv . Print. Aberdeen University Press, 1898), 41. It is possible

"Ismaili Ritual Sermons and Lists of Saints." No other information regarding its contents was provided in the published catalog and the only way to identify it as the *K. al-Mashyakha* is from its date given as "about A.D. 1820" and from its Lindesiana shelf mark, 722, mentioned in the John Ryland's catalogue in the entry on the *K. al-Mashyakha*.[285]

How did this manuscript arrive at the Bibliotheca Lindesiana? In his 1977 study of the lives and libraries of the Earls of Crawford, Nicolas Barker, a scholar of antiquarian books, writes that Lindsay's book buyer, a man by the name of Bernard Quaritch, obtained "several manuscripts of the prayers and legends of the Ansairis" from "a Syrian working as a clerk in the city" named Catafago.[286]As may be recalled, Joseph Catafago wrote the original notice about the *K. al-Mashyakha*, which appeared in the *Journal Asiatique* in July 1848. It seems that sometime between 1853 and 1858 Joseph Catafago left Syria and moved to London where he occupied himself with the compilation of an Arabic-English dictionary.[287] While in London, he made the

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that this error was due to a misunderstanding of the relationship between Nuṣayrīs and Ismāʿīlīs. Although Lyde had made the distinction between these two sects quite clear the two were often conflated.

[285] The handwritten notes of Michael Kerney, who was the cataloguer of Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliotheca Lindesiana, provide additional information: "MS 722, Ismaiʿilī Rituals, Sermons, and Lists of Saints. 62 Leaves clearly written in Naskhi. Written in Syria about 1820. A curious volume which shows singular resemblances to the Druze books. One of the pieces is addressed to Christians and informs them that Christ was not really put to death or crucified. The Ḳurʾan and the Bible are freely quoted. There is no intitulation or description to specify the exact sect; but it is plainly the ritual of a faith in which ʿAli holds a higher place than Muhammad and is treated as a divinity. An inscription at the end says that the book 'is in the handwriting of our uncle's son, the Shaykh ʿAli,' and deprecates any disparagement of the text. It is by implication a sort of presentation-inscription." Michael Kerney, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts belonging to the Earl of Crawford* (unpublished, n.d.) The quotation from the inscription was misunderstood by Kerney. It in fact reads that the book was written in honor of shaykh ʿAlī, not by him. I would like to thank Elisabeth Gow, the manuscript curator at the John Rylands Library, where these handwritten notes are now housed, for supplying me with a copy of this entry.

[286] Nicolas Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana: The Lives and Collections of Alexander William, 25th Earl of Crawford and 8th Earl of Balcarres, and James Lidovic, 26th Earl of Crawford and 9th Earl of Balcarres* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1977), 209.

[287] Joseph Catafago, *An English and Arabic Dictionary, in Two Parts, Arabic and English, and English and Arabic: in which the Arabic Words are Represented in the Oriental Character, as well as their Correct Pronunciation and Accentuation shewn in English Letters* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1858). The dates for Catafago's move to London are obtained from the biographical information given on the title page of the dictionary which state the following: "Joseph Catafago, of Aleppo in Syria, Secretary to Soliman Pasha (Major-General to the Egyptian Army in Syria), 1839-1840; first interpreter and chancellor of the general consulate of Prussia at Beirut, 1842-1851;

acquaintance of Bernard Quaritch who, in addition to being Lindsay's personal book buyer, was a well-known London-based book dealer and publisher responsible for many of the nineteenth century contributions to the field of Oriental studies. In fact, Bernard Quaritch Booksellers published Catafago's Arabic-English dictionary in 1858. In the preface to this work, Catafago attributes the idea for the dictionary to Bernard Quaritch, whom he calls a friend.[288] There is moreover a record in the form of letters between Catafago and Lord Lindsay that in 1862 Catafago was hired to complete various scribal projects for the library.[289] So the link between Joseph Catafago and the Bibliotheca Lindesiana is well documented and there can be no doubt that the same Joseph Catafago who examined the *K. al-Mashyakha* in Syria in 1848 is the one who sold it to the library after his arrival in London, more precisely in 1858. The invoice is still preserved in the Crawford Muniments, the collection of documents relating to the Bibliotheca Lindesiana now held at the National Library of Scotland. Recorded for February 18, 1858, is the purchase of a Nuṣayrī book, (incorrectly) identified as "Hymns of the Ismailis," for £1 as well as a "prayer book of the Ansairis," surely our *K. al-Mashyakha*, for the price of £3.[290] These are the two items later catalogued as MSS 721 and 722 of the Bibliotheca Lindesiana and MSS 123 and

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secretary of the general consulate of Russia at Beirut, 1851-1853; corresponding member of the Asiatic Societies of Paris and Leipsic, and of the Syrio-Egyptian society of London; translator of "Catechism of the Ansaris," presented to H.M. the King of Prussia in 1845, and of other Arabic manuscripts etc. etc." Since Catafago's last listed employment in Beirut was in 1853 and the preface to his dictionary is signed with his residence given as "London, 7 Howard Street, Strand, September 1858" One can assume that he moved to London sometime between these dates.

[288] Ibid., vi.

[289] Accession 9769, Library Papers 3: The Crawford Muniments: Letter, 4 March 1862, of Catafago to Lord Lindsay, item no. 40, and Letter, 8 April 1862, of Catafago to Lord Lindsay, item no.70.

[290] Accession 9769, Library Papers 315, item no. 5569.

124 of the John Rylands library, and along with the *Dīwān* of al-Khaṣībī (MS 655/452) are the only works of Nuṣayrī liturgy in the entire collection.[291]

This takes us back to the problem of how Catafago had obtained a copy of Muḥammad of Bishrāghi's *K. al-Mashyakha* when we know that Lyde purchased it from a Christian merchant in Latakia in 1859? This can be explained in one of two ways: either Catafago and Lyde each had their own duplicate copies which had been produced while the original manuscript was still among the Nuṣayrīs, or Catafago personally copied this text when the merchant who later sold it to Lyde lent it to him, presumably in 1848 when his article about it appeared. The second theory is the more likely as it would better explain the identical colophons. We know from his notice in the *Journal Asiatique* that Catafago intended to publish a translation of this manuscript. If Lyde was correct in assuming that he had only borrowed the *K. al-Mashyakha*, it would have made sense for him to make a copy for his personal use. This assumption would also explain why the copyist removed the apparent dittography in the patronymic of Muhammad of Bishrāghī instead of supplying the missing name, as a Nuṣayrī copyist would probably have done: Catafago was not familiar with it. According to this theory, the *K. al-Mashyakha* housed at the John Rylands Library was not reproduced by a Nuṣayrī but rather by Joseph Catafago.

There is nothing in the Crawford Muniments to confirm this theory, but it is possible that Catafago did not reveal this information to Quaritch, or if he did, it was simply not documented. Of course, the alternate suggestion, that Catafago and Lyde had each discovered distinct copies

[291] There still remains a description of the contents of MS 721 written in Catafago's own hand. This description was originally attached to a letter written by Bernard Quaritch to Lord Lindsay on February 25, 1858 informing him of the purchase of the manuscript from Catafago. (Accession 9769, Library Papers 3; item no. 51). However it subsequently became detached from the Crawford Correspondences and can now be found at the John Rylands Library where it is attached to the relevant entry for MS 721 in Kerney, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts belonging to the Earl of Crawford*. It is likely that when Kerney wrote his notes for the catalogue he consulted this letter but neglected to return it to its proper location.

of this manuscript, must also be entertained. In support of this hypothesis is the fact that Catafago's 1848 notice of the *K. al-Mashyakha* in the *Journal Asiatique* includes an Arabic table of contents, which exists in Manchester 124 but is absent from Lyde 17. It is impossible to tell for certain, however, if the table in Catafago's article was copied from an actual table of contents in the manuscript or is simply a list of the chapter headings. In other words, the table of contents in Manchester 124 could be Catafago's personal addition to the text. On balance, the fact that the two manuscripts have identical colophons weights strongly in favor of the first hypothesis as a Western scholar would have copied the manuscript as he found it, complete with its colophon, instead of inserting his own.

MS Paris Arabe 6182, fols. 20a-37a, and the *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya*

Be that as it may, there is a third copy of the *K. al-Mashyakha*, if only a partial one, in Paris Arabe 6182 fols. 20a-37a. This manuscript is an anthology of Nuṣayrī works dealing with initiation and is best known for including the *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya*, the catechism of the Nuṣayrī religion, which has recently been studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky.[292] The elements of Lyde's text that can be found verbatim in Paris Arabe 6182 are *al-Tawjīh*, the final chapters of the *K. al-Mashyakha* that deal with drinking the *ʿabd al-nūr* (fols. 20a-30b) as well as *Khiṭāb al-tilmīdh baʿd al-suʾāl* and *al-ʿIqād*, the two texts appended to the *K. al-Mashyakha* that deal with initiation (31a-37a).[293] Since the addition of the chapters on initiation to the main body of the *K.*

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[292] See "A Catechism of the Nuṣayrī Religion" in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 163-221.

[293] These correspond to items 16-33 of Catafago, "Lettre de M. Catafago," 77-78. And items 17-32 of Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 243-57. It should be noted that the order of the chapters on initiation (*Khiṭāb al-tilmīdh baʿd al-suʾāl* and *al-ʿIqād*) in MS Paris 6182, is the reverse order of that in MS Lyde 17 and MS Manchester 124 and is likely an error.

al-Mashyakha was likely an innovation of Muḥammad of Bishrāghī, one must assume that the Paris manuscript, which follows this same order, was somehow based on his text.[294]

Although Bar-Asher and Kofsky noted that these treatises are also found in Manchester 124, they did not recognize the identity of any of these texts with Lyde's lost *K. al-Mashyakha.* They were not the first to overlook this relationship; Lyde, who actually included a translation of the *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya* in his *Asian Mystery*, never noticed it either. The culprit behind this confusion is once again Joseph Catafago, who was also the first to publicize this work. Like Bar-Asher and Kofsky, Catafago was particularly interested in the catechism that opened this anthology. In 1845 he sent an Arabic copy of this catechism along with a French translation of the entire manuscript to the King of Prussia, by whom he was then employed.[295] From the French translation of the manuscript, the German Orientalist Phillip Wolff produced a German translation of the catechism, which he published in 1849. [296] Lyde then rendered Wolff's translation into English and appended it to his *Asian Mystery*.[297] This is clearly a case of crucial information being lost in translation. Not having examined the original, Lyde never knew that Catafago's manuscript also included parts of his *K. al-Mashyakha*.

He did, however, recognize that the contents of the catechism were extremely similar to that of his *K. al-Mashyakha.* He writes, "It will be seen, on comparing this catechism with the

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[294] This conclusion would allows us to roughly date MS Paris Arabe 6182 to some time between 1824, when Muḥammad of Bishrāghī's *K. al-Mashyakha* was copied, and 1845, when MS Paris Arabe 6182 was first brought to light.

[295] See Fleischer, "Wissenschaftlicher Jahresbericht," *Jahresbericht der D. M. G.* (1846): 130; "Aus einem Briefe von Dr. Schultz, Kön. Preussischem Consul in Jerusalem," *Z.D.M.G.* 1(1847): 353. In which Dr. Schultz discusses Catafago's catechism and also mentions two other manuscripts delivered by Catafago: one dealing with Nuṣayrī feasts, surely the *majmūʿ al-aʿyād* (MS Berlin 4292), as well as a small Nuṣayrī prayer book (probably that contained in MS Berlin 4291).

[296] Philipp Wolff, "Auszüge aus dem Katechismus der Nosairier," *Z. D. M. G.* 3(1849): 302-9.

[297] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 270-82.

sketch I have given of my MS., the 'Manual of Shaykhs,' that the arrangement and contents are in the main the same. Even single expressions are nearly identical, and would probably be found to be exactly so could the two Arabic texts be compared."[298] Lyde documented the similarity between his manuscript and the catechism by providing references to both works in his footnotes to his descriptions Nuṣayrī beliefs. The similarity he noticed is due to the fact that the *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya* was actually based on the *K. al-Mashyakha* and conceived as a digest of the Nuṣayrī doctrines from this work that a student needed to memorize as part of his induction into the sect. Just about every question in the catechism is directly excerpted from the prayers of the *K. al-Mashyakha.*[299] Between the catechism and the chapters of the *K. al-Mashyakha* quoted in full, almost the entire content of Lyde's manuscript is accounted for in Paris Arabe 6182. Had Catafago ever accomplished his goal of publishing the *K. al-Mashyakha*, he would undoubtedly have noted the relationship between this text and the one he had previously translated for the

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[298] Ibid., 270.

[299] The following is a list of the catechism questions that derive from the *K. al-Mashyakha.* I provide the references to both MS Lyde 17 and MS Manchester 124: Q2= (MS Lyde 17: 6; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 3b.); Q3= (MS Lyde 17: 93-95; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 29a-b.); Q4-5= (MS Lyde 17: 8; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 3b-4a.); Q9= (MS Lyde 17: 20; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 7b.); Q11= (MS Lyde 17: 110-11; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 34b-35a.); Q14= (MS Lyde 17: 66-68. Arabic MS 124 [722]: 20b-21a.); Q15=(MS Lyde 17: 75; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 23b.); Q16-21=(MS Lyde 17: 60-65; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 19a-20b.); Q22= (MS Lyde 17: 38-40; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 12b-13b.); Q23-42= (MS Lyde 17: 45-59; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 14b-18b.); Q43=(MS Lyde 17: 78-83; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 24a-25b.); Q44= (MS Lyde 17: 84-86. Arabic MS 124 [722]: 26a-b.); Q45-49 =(MS Lyde 17: 88-90; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 27b.); Q51-52= (MS Lyde 17: 80-81; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 25a.); Q56-65= (MS Lyde 17: 27-31; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 9a-10b.); Q66-67= (MS Lyde 17: 35-38; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 11b-12b.); Q69= (MS Lyde 17: 33-34; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 11a-11b.); Q70= (MS Lyde 17: 42-44; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 13b-14a.) Q71= MS Lyde 17: 40; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 13a.); Q75=(MS Lyde 17: 2; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 2a.); Q83= (MS Lyde 17: 164; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 51b.); Q84-85= (MS Lyde 17: 171-72; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 53b-54a.); Q86= (MS Lyde 17: 175; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 55a.); Q87= (MS Lyde 17: 126-31; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 40a-41b.); Q88= (MS Lyde 17: 133-36; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 41b-42b.); Q89-90= (MS Lyde 17: 131-32; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 41b.); Q92= MS Lyde 17: 133-35; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 42a-42b.); Q99=(MS Lyde 17: 144; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 45b.); Q101= MS Lyde 17: 69-73; Arabic MS 124 [722]: 21b-23a. Those catechism questions not accounted for in this list are for the most part explanations of concepts introduced in questions that do derive from the *K. al-Mashyakha*. One notable exception is the controversial Q77, which makes reference to sacramental bread called *al-qurbān*, the inclusion of which has been the primary indication of Christian influence on this text. There is no mention of such a sacrament in the *K. al-Mashyakha* and so one must assume that it was an addition of the author.

King of Prussia. But since he never did, and Lyde's illness prevented him from personally examining the source of Catafago's catechism, the connection remained obscured.[300]

The *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī K. al-Mashyakha*

The latest development in the story of the *K. al-Mashyakha* is the recent publication of another version of this work by the Lebanese press Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifa in the ninth installment of their *Silsilāt al-turāth al-ʿalawī*, which came out in 2008.[301] The *K. al-Mashyakha* included in their series (henceforth *STA K. al-Mashyakha*) is much longer and more detailed than the one studied by Lyde but it is clearly related. Like all of the manuals described in this paper, the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* begins with a liturgical section, which includes those prayers and invocations found in Lyde's text as well as others, taken from various sources. As in Lyde's text, the prayer section is followed by instructions for initiation, which are more detailed but clearly derived from the account in Lyde's text. The book then concludes with additional chapters on marriage, death, and food preparation. The meticulous stage directions that accompany all of these chapters make the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* an invaluable commentary on the older text at its core.

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[300] It should be noted that the handwriting of MS Paris 6182 is identical to that of MS Manchester 124 and is therefore also likely to be a copy produced by Catafago. It is known that Catafago made copies of this manuscript. As mentioned above, he produced a copy (of the catechism) for the King of Prussia that is now housed in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (MS Berlin 2086). It also seems that Phillip Wolff, who produced the German translation from Catafago's French translation, inspected another copy owned by Catafago when he visited him in Beirut. I do not know what became of this copy; perhaps it is MS Paris 6182. What is known of the history of MS Paris 6182 is that Jean-Adolphe Decourdemanche (1844-1916), a scholar and collector of Islamic manuscripts, donated it to the Bibliothèque Nationale in November 1905. (See E. Blochet, *Inventaire des Manuscrits Arabes de la Collection Decourdemanche* (Besançon: Typographie et Lithograph Jacquin, 1906), 3-4, 7-8.) There is a mark on folio 1 of the manuscript, which indicates that it had been a possession of Joseph Catafago, Beirut, so we know that it came from him, but I have not yet been able to discover whether Catafago sold it directly to Decourdemanche or if there were intervening owners. Perhaps this is something that Catafago regularly did, produce copies of manuscripts and sell them to European collectors. Without overstating this point, I might hesitantly suggest that the title of the catechism, *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya*, which scholars as early as Lyde have suspected of being a later (outside) addition, may have been introduced by Catafago when he copied the text.

[301] *STA Kitāb al-Mashyakha* ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Musā, Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī 9 (*Kutub al-ʿAlawiyyīn al-Muqaddasa*) (Diyār ʿAql: Lebanon Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa 2008), 141-230.

While the exact relationship between these two works has not yet been determined, it is clear that they are connected. Their intertextuality reveals the significance of the *K. al-Mashyakha,* which managed to influence the creation of the anthology on initiation found in Paris Arabe 6182 as well as the more extensive manual for shaykhs published in the *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī*. Who knows how many other works have been marked by this text? It has clearly also had as active a life among the early Orientalist scholars of the nineteenth century, and its impact, after its presumed disappearance, can rival that of most published texts, having been quoted time and again from Lyde's excerpts of the *K. al-Mashyakha* and from the *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya.* Now that this work has been rediscovered, a more thorough investigation of its contents can finally be resumed, one that will take into account the advance of scholarship on the Nuṣayrī religion in the last one hundred and fifty-two years since Lyde based the first monograph on Nuṣayrism on this text in 1860. In the near future, I hope to undertake such a project and contribute another piece to our ever-evolving understanding of this secretive faith by producing an annotated translation of this important work. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will confine myself to an analysis of those sections relating to initiation which are now available in four copies: MS Cambridge 1422 (Jesus No.17), MS Manchester 124, MS Paris 6182, and the *Silsilāt al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī* publication.

Sulaymān al-Adhanī and the *K. al-Bākūra*

The final available reference for the study of Nuṣayrī initiation ceremonies is the well-known *Kitāb al-Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya fī kashf asrār al-diyāna al-Nuṣayriyya* (The Book of Sulaymān's First Ripe Fruit in Disclosing the Secrets of the Nuṣayrī Religion) of the Nuṣayrī

apostate Sulaymān al-Adhanī.[302] Since this is the only source in which the author reveals first-hand details of his educational background and initiation, a short outline will be provided. Sulaymān was born in 1250/1834-5 in Antakya in Southern Turkey. From the preferential treatment he received during his initiation and the leniency with which the Nuṣayrī leadership dealt with his religious experimentation it seems likely that he came from a respected Nuṣayrī family although the only details he provides is that his family belonged to the Shamālī sub-sect of the Nuṣayriyya and were not of the *ʿāmma*, the uninitiated masses. Sulaymān's family moved to Adana, also in southern Turkey, where he began his three-stage initiation at the age of eighteen. His education extended over the course of three years and was never formally concluded as he was suspected of harboring Muslim beliefs and was caught reading books of Quranic *tafsīr*.[303] Despite this obstacle Sulaymān claims that he was able to bribe a traveling shaykh to disclose to him the deepest secrets of the religion.[304] He found these to be so repulsive that he stopped attending the gatherings of his sect and refused to eat their meat.

Despairing of convincing Sulaymān of the truth of their religion, the Shamālī shaykhs agreed to allow Sulaymān to be initiated into the rival Kalāzī sub-sect in the hope that they would succeed where the Shamālīs had failed. Sulaymān writes that he studied with the Kalāzīs for nine months, even becoming engaged to the daughter of their imam. But after reading a secret book that his betrothed had smuggled for him from her father's collection, Sulaymān concluded

[302] al-Adhanī, Sulayman. *Kitāb al-Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya fī Kashf Asrār al-Diyāna al-Nuṣayriyya* (Beirut 1862).

[303] Ibid., 74.

[304] Sulaymān says that his primary objection was the shamālī belief that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib was incarnate in the dog of the *ahl al-kahf*. He could not believe that the *maʿnā* would reveal himself in a form which is almost universally considered to be ritually impure. Sulaymān initially agreed to join the *Kalāzī* sect because they did not hold this belief, claiming instead that the dog was Salmān al-Farisī. (ibid., 90.)

that the Kalāzī beliefs were even less convincing than those of the Shamālīs.[305] Eventually, what led him to break with the Nuṣayrī religion all together was his discovery that the Kalāzīs practiced guest prostitution and considered the sharing of one's wives with traveling shaykhs to be a religious obligation.[306] Not wanting to have to offer his own wife in such a manner, Sulaymān ran away and began studying other religious traditions eventually converting to Judaism and then later to Christianity.

Sulaymān is upfront about the many oaths of secrecy he was made to swear during his initiation ceremonies and describes in detail the efforts taken by the Nuṣayrī community to keep him from disclosing their secrets once he had broken with their tradition. Ultimately he felt that it was his religious duty as a Christian to expose and refute their beliefs. With this objective in mind, Sulaymān composed and published the *K. al-Bākūra*, thereby committing the most fundamental and unforgivable offence of the Nuṣayrī religion. Unfortunately the publication of his work led to his demise. Sulaymān's former Nuṣayrī coreligionists lured him to Latakia where he was burned to death as punishment for breaking his oaths of secrecy.[307]

The publication of the *K. al-Bākūra* in 1863 and the excerpted translation published by Salisbury the following year in *JAOS* made the work the most important and easily accessible source for the study of the Nuṣayrī religion. [308] It was the first time that Nuṣayrī beliefs were explained in detail by an initiate to outsiders. It was also the first time that non-initiates gained access to the *Kitāb al-Majmūʿ*, the Nuṣayrī canon, also known as the *Dustūr*, the instruction

[305] Ibid., 91.

[306] Ibid., 93-94. See the appendix at the end of this study for an in-depth discussion of the rite of guest prostitution among Nuṣayrīs in the nineteenth century.

[307] Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*: 260, 503 (fn25). Another report has al-Adhanī strangled to death. See al-Ṭawīl, *Tārīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*: 448.

[308] Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit." 227-308.

manual, which Sulaymān received during his initiation and included in the text of the *K. al-Bākūra*. Several other Nuṣayrī works, some of which were only published in the last few years by the *Dār li-ajl al-Maʿarifa*, were named by Sulaymān giving a much fuller picture of the Nuṣayrī religion than had previously been possible. The importance of this work, as well as the dearth of other references, ensured that the *K. al-Bākūra* remained the primary source for scholarly studies of the Nuṣayriyya for the next century.

Significantly, the *K. al-Bākūra* served as the primary source for René Dussaud's *Histoire et religion des Nosairīs* which was the definitive survey of the sect from 1900 to 2010 when Yaron Friedman published *The Nuṣayrī- ʿAlawīs: an introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*. Aside from basing the majority of his information on al-Adhanī's book, Dussaud reprinted the sixteen prayers of al-Adhanī's *K. al-Majmūʿ* along with a French translation in an appendix to his work.[309] These prayers had already been made accessible to Western audiences through Salisbury's article in *JAOS*,[310] but Dussaud reprinted them in his survey in acknowledgement of their supreme significance for the Nuṣairī faith. The sixteen prayers of this book form the core of Nuṣayrī liturgy and their memorization is the final ordeal of Nuṣayrī initiates. Consequently, knowledge of these prayers acts as the distinguishing marker of a believer and the way in which he can be recognized among outsiders. Al-Ṭabarānī goes as far as to insist that a believer who forgets these prayers must be initiated anew, as has been described in the previous chapter.

Although references to this collection of prayers had appeared in other works, al-Adhanī was the only author to disclose its contents until 2008 when the Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifa published

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[309] Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nosairīs*, 161-198.

[310] Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 234-63.

another version of the *K. al-Majmūʿ* under the title *K. al-Dustūr* in the ninth installment of their *turāth al-ʿalawī* series, the same volume in which they printed the *K. al-Mashyakha*.[311] The sixteen prayers in their version of the *K. al-Majmūʿ* are slightly different than those in Sulaymān al-Adhanī's book, which may be explained by the fact that they derive from different factions within the Nuṣayrī community; al-Adhanī's from the Shamālī sect and the Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifa's from the Kalāzīs.

MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564

However, I have recently located a third copy of the *K. al-Majmūʿ* in the *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya*, the Egyptian National Library, which I believe to be intimately related to al-Adhanī's text. This manuscript belongs to the *Khizana al-Taymuriyya* which is the private collection donated to the *Dār al-Kutub* in 1930 by Aḥmad Taymūr, a wealthy Egyptian of Kurdish extraction. This collection, consisting of over 4,000 Arabic manuscripts and books, is further subdivided by genre so that the manuscript in question bears the shelf-mark *ʿAqāʾid Taymūr* 564 which means that it is the 564th MS in the doctrines subgenre of the Taymūriyya Library.

In the *Fihris al-Khizānah al-Taymūriyya*, this manuscript is descriptively titled *al-majmūʿ fī ʿaqāʾid al-Nuṣayriyya* (a collection of Nuṣayrī doctrines) and the only details provided are that it was transcribed in 1306 AH and includes the doctrines and prayers of the Nuṣayrīs.[312]

[311] *Kitāb al-Dustūr* ed. Abū Mūsā wa-al-Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-ʻAlawī 9 (*Kutub al-ʻAlawiyyin al-muqaddasa*) (Diyār ʻAql [Lebanon] Dār Li-Ajl al-Maʻrifah), 12-28.

[312] *Fihris al-Khizāna al-Taymūriyya* (Cairo1948), III:117. This manuscript is item 124 in Massignon's bibliography of Nuṣayrī works. See Louis Massignon, "Esquisse d'une Bibliographie Nusayrie (1938)," in *Opera Minora. Textes recueillis,classés et présentés avec une bibliographie, par Y. Moubarac.* (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963), 648. Massignon does not however appear to have inspected this manuscript or else he would have noticed its relationship to al-Adhanī's work which is the following item in his list.

But the actual title which appears on the cover page of the manuscript is *K. al-Majmūʿ*, which can literally be translated as 'the canon' or 'the compilation' under which is a subtitle explaining that the book contains, "the mystery of God, the obligations, the prayers, the invocations, the ritual laws, and the distinguishing signs of our sacred community." [313] The author/copyist of this text is not named but from the dedication inscription that appears at the end of the manuscript we know that it was written as an instruction manual for the believers of Hama who did not have a local shaykh to instruct them on the beliefs and practices of the religion. The author writes, "I have transcribed this blessed manuscript, issued according to its correct source on 8 Jumādda al-Awwal 1306 (January 9, 1889) for the benefit of our brothers in the faith in the city of Hama where there is no guide and no imam. I have donated it to them and I don't want anything in return other than prayer and acceptance." The author then identifies himself ambiguously as" the mendicant who supplicates on behalf of the right of the brothers to Ibn Nuṣayr the believer."[314]

Like the *K. al-Majmūʿ* given to al-Adhanī, this book was meant as an instruction manual for initiates, containing the principal prayers and beliefs of the faith. Although the *Taymūriyya K. al-Majmūʿ* does not include all of the prayers described by al-Adhanī, those that do appear are identical to those of the *K. al-Bākūra*, even in places that one would expect to find differences. For example, the fourth chapter of the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, titled *sūrat al-nasab*, is the pedigree chapter in which every believer is meant to insert his individual religious lineage. For this reason, one would not expect to find two versions of the *sūrat al-nasab* that bear identical lineages unless the owners of those books had been initiated by the same shaykh. And in fact, al-

[313] MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya).

[314] Ibid., 80.

Adhanī's *sūrat al-nasab* and that of the Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifah sport different lineages. But the pedigree found in MS Taymūr 564 is exactly the same as that provided by al-Adhanī.[315]

The similarities between al-Adhanī's *K. al-Bākūra* and MS Taymūr 562 are not limited to the sixteen prayers of the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, some of al-Adhanī's paragraphs explaining Nuṣayrī doctrines and practices can also be found verbatim in MS Taymūr 564, while others are revealed to be summarized paraphrases of longer discussions in the Taymūriyya MS. In fact, one such overlap is even acknowledged in the *K. al-Bākūra* in al-Adhanī's *tafsīr* of the second *sūra* of the *K. al-Majmūʿ* titled *taqdisat ibn al-walī* (the sanctification of Ibn al-Walī). This chapter is a prayer in praise of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and al-Adhanī explains that it was composed by a follower of Muḥammad al-Bāqir who was woken from his sleep by a heavenly voice only to find himself alone and miraculously transported from his bed to a maze in the wilderness. Al-Adhanī writes that this information for the origin of the *sūra* is "plainly mentioned in the *K. al-Majmūʿ*,"[316] and indeed, one can find a longer more detailed explication of this same information in MS Taymūr 564.[317]

If one were to estimate the overlap between these two works, it would appear that roughly fifty percent of all of al-Adhanī's information can also be found in the Taymūriyya MS. This overlap can only be explained by the fact that both books were based on the same text. I do not think that MS Taymūr 564 could actually have been al-Adhanī's source. As I will describe in the appendix to this dissertation, the Taymūriyya manuscript features some extremely surprising chapters defending such antinomian practices as guest prostitution, incest, and the orgiastic

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[315] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 14-6; MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564: 42-4.

[316] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra,* 11.

[317] MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564: 34-5.

night. Although opponents of the Nuṣayrīs have always accused them of such libertine behavior, there has been no internal evidence in Nuṣayrī sources to confirm these rumors. In fact, as will be seen in my discussion of Nuṣayrī attitudes towards Islamic law, most extant Nuṣayrī works are marked by strong condemnations of libertinism and equally strong exhortations towards ritual observance. MS Taymūr 564 is the only available Nuṣayrī source, and possibly the only piece of *ghulāt* literature, to definitively advocate these practices. Had al-Adhanī access to these chapters in his own copy of the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, he would surely have quoted them in his *K. al-Bākūra* as they support many of his polemical agendas.

What I believe is the most likely explanation for the similarities between the *K. al-Bākūra* and MS Taymūr 564 is that both were based on identical copies of an earlier *K. al-Majmūʿ* but were then expanded with information from other books. This earlier *K. al-Majmūʿ* was not merely the collection of sixteen prayers published by Dussaud under this title, but also included the *tafsīr* of these prayers, other invocations, explanations of important Nuṣayrī doctrines, methods of identifying believers among outsiders, etc. It was an actual *K. al-Majmūʿ*, a book of compilation, in which were collected all of the important information that a newly minted initiate ought to know.

This explanation would account for the two titles by which the sixteen prayers have been known, *K. al-Majmūʿ* and *K. al-Dustūr*. In the introduction to the Dār li-ajl al-maʿrifa version of this work the editors explain the different titles by the fact that the Shamālīs call it *K. al-Majmūʿ* and the Kalāzīs call it *K. al-Dustūr.*[318] This may be accurate but it is likely that the earlier name for the compilation of prayers is *K. al-Dustūr*. Al-Ṭabarānī referred to it by this title.[319] In his day

[318] *Kitāb al-Dustūr* 12.

[319] Abū Sa'īd Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī fī 'Ilm al-fatāwī* ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-Turāth al-'Alawī 3 (*Rasā'il al-Ḥikma al-'Alawiyya*) (Diyār 'Aql: Lebanon: Dār li-Ajl al-Ma'rifa, 2006),

the *K. al-Dustūr* consisted of fewer chapters and it has been speculated that al-Ṭabarānī was the one to expand the *K. al-Dustūr* to its present length as part of his polemic against his Isḥāqī rival, Ismāʿīl b. Khallād.[320] The term *K. al-Majmūʿ* likely came later as a metonymy from the entire manual for initiates by this title of which the most important section was the sixteen prayers of the *Dustūr* but which also included other elements as well. By comparing the *K. al-Bākūra* of Sulaymān al-Adhanī and MS Taymūr 564, the contents of this earlier *K. al-Majmūʿ* can be reconstructed and our understanding of the ways in which Nuṣayrīs transmitted information to the next generation can be expanded

Returning to our particular interest in the *K. al-Bākūra* for this section of the dissertation, namely, its descriptions of initiation, it should be noted that MS Taymūr 564 provides no information about how the actual ceremonies of initiation are to be conducted.[321] Being a *K. al-Majmūʿ*, it would only have been given to students who have successfully completed their initiation; a description of the ceremonies would have been superfluous in a work of this genre. Al-Adhanī's account of the ceremonies was likely not based on a written account, of the sort we encounter in the various manuals for shaykhs, but on his own experiences. Therefore al-Adhanī's description of his own initiation, which diverges from the outline provided by the manuals described above in several respects, needs to be read with caution, taking into consideration the inherent advantages and disadvantages of employing this work in a study of Nuṣayrī initiation.

50,53,65,105,. Al-Ṭabarānī even mentions the names of several of the prayers in the *K. al-Dustūr*, namely, *al-ubūwa* (*al-naṣab), al-fatḥ*, *al-ṣarf*, *al-shahādda*. Ibid., 110.

[320] See the introduction to the Dār li'Ajl al-Maʿrifa *Kitāb al-Dustūr* 5,12-13. The editors of the *K. al-Dustūr* provide an obviously anachronistic *ḥadīth* from the now lost *K. al-Kāfī li-l-ḍidd al-munāfī* of Ibn Nuṣayr in which ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib prophesies the future leadership of al-Khaṣībī and al-Ṭabarānī who will write the *Dustūr* in which the true religion will be taught. See ibid., 12-3.

[321] MS Taymūriyya 564 does include instructions for believers to repeat the sacred invocation *sirr ʿa-m-s* five hundred times a day, (see MS Taymūr, ʿAqāʾid 564: 31). These instructions were given to al-Adhanī at his second initiation ceremony called *jamʿīyyat al-malīk* (al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 3).

In support of al-Adhanī's text, one need point out that unlike the manuals described above, Sulaymān's account is firsthand and might therefore be a more accurate depiction of initiation as it was conducted in reality. To be fair, the fact that the other descriptions come from instructional manuals is not necessarily an indication of their relative weakness. Imams conducted initiatory ceremonies among Nusayrīs and so the distinction that is sometimes drawn between law and practice or official and popular custom does not necessarily apply to this context. The shaykhs who composed and copied the instructional tracts were the same men who officiated over the ceremonies described within. Therefore it is probable that the actual practice of initiation conformed to the instructional texts. This speculation aside, the *K. al-Bākūra* is currently the only firsthand report of a Nuṣayrī initiation that actually took place and therefore the ways in which it conforms and diverges from the official accounts needs to be taken seriously.

The drawbacks of employing al-Adhanī's text in this context relate firstly to the fact that his account was written several years after the events it purports to describe and there is always a possibility that some elements were remembered incorrectly. Also, according to the author's own admission, his initiation was never fully concluded, in that he did not finish his education period. Of course, this does not preclude him from describing those ceremonies that he actually did attend. But the divergences and some of the unconfirmed ideas that Sulaymān describes might have to do with the fact that he got quite a bit of his information through unconventional channels. Finally, Sulaymān's objective in writing the *K. al-Bākūra* is admittedly polemical and therefore one must to be suspect of credulously accepting every feature of the initiatory ceremonies he describes. This particular issue comes to the fore when one notes how much bloodier the threats against those who might disclose the secret are in al-Adhanī's account of

initiation than in the other sources. As will be seen in the following chapter, the substance of these threats is always the same, but al-Adhanī's account is more explicitly gruesome. While this might have been an accurate description of his experience, it is also possible that he exaggerated these for theatrical effect. These limitations in mind, the general conformity of Sulaymān's experience with the main features of all of the other accounts gives credence to his report.

Summary of the Sources

The sources I have described above can be grouped into three distinct traditions of initiatory literate. The *Sharḥ al-imām* (MS Paris 1450) is most closely related to the classical model of initiation described in the *K. al-Ḥāwī* of al-Ṭabarānī. The *K. al-Mashyakha* (in its various editions) as well as the catechism, *K. Taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya*, comprise the second category. Finally, the *K. al-Bākūra* of al-Adhanī and the related *K. al-Majmūʿ* (MS Taymūr 564) make up the third category. Despite their differences, all of the sources introduced above have features in common and it is clear that they derive from the same tradition of initiation. Dating the origin of this tradition is difficult. Some elements can already be found in the works of al-Ṭabarānī but others are arguably later. The traditions governing Nuṣayrī initiation are at times referred to in the texts as the *qānūn* (law), adherence to which is required for proper entry into the sect.[322] In several of the accounts there appears as a regular feature of the ceremony an attempt by the imam to break with the *qānūn* which must be rejected en masse by the community.[323] This institutionalized performance of communal self-regulation highlights the

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[322] Ibid., 2,5; *STA K. al-Mashyakha* ed. Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Musā, Silsilat Al-Turāth Alʿalawī 9 (*Kutub al-ʿAlawiyyin al-Muqaddasa*) (Diyār ʿAql: Lebanon Dār li-Ajl al-Maʿrifa 2008), 217-8.

[323] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 5; *STA K. al-Mashyakha* 217-8.

extreme importance placed on upholding the correct tradition of initiation even if it requires defiance against the explicit instructions of the communal leader.

In the following chapter I will attempt to reconstruct the general outline of this *qānūn* by describing the features that the various accounts have in common. In this process I hope also to provide insight into the religious beliefs that inform these rites, which are shared by every novice and are therefore crucial to the education and self-definition of the Nuṣayrī believer.

Chapter Four: The Initiation Ceremonies

Sharb al-Sār, Taʿlīq, and Samāʿ

Three ceremonies are generally involved in initiation: *sharb al-sār*, *taʿlīq*, and *samāʿ*, which sometimes appear under different names. Successful completion of these stages is required for the student to be admitted to the sect and granted access to its religious texts, which he studies in the final 'breastfeeding' or *fiqh* learning stage. Progress through these stages cannot be accomplished alone and can only be achieved through attachment to a sponsor called a *sayyid* (master) or *ʿamm* (uncle) who will grant the student access to the religious teachings and rites associated with each stage. In each of the ceremonies there are several constant actors who must follow scripted instructions. The main players are of course the student and *sayyid*, but the imam, his assistant the *naqīb*, and the assembled community all play a role.

The *Sharb al-Sār* Ceremony

In the first ceremony, called *sharb al-sār,* an uninitiated youth is temporarily attached to a Nuṣayrī shaykh who will allow him to drink the consecrated wine called *ʿabd al-nūr* under his sponsorship. The name of the ceremony is probably a play-on-words between *suʾr* meaning remnant and *sirr* meaning secret.[324]

During the ceremony the novice is given to drink the remnant of his teacher's cup of wine thereby partaking of the great mystery inherent in it. *Sharb al-sār* is not a required stage of initiation and can be skipped; a novice can join the sect only having progressed through *taʿlīq*

[324] See al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 75, where it says, "the *sār* (*sāʾir*) is the remnant (*suʾr*) and the remnant of the believers is a cure". See also *STA K. al-Mashyakha:,* 216, where the imam is instructed to place a drop of wine on the thumb of the *sayyid*, which the student must kiss as a celebration of the mystery (*sirr*) of *ʿa-m-s.*

and *samāʿ*. In fact, the instructions for initiation in the *Sharḥ al-imām* and in the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha* do not include directions for this first ceremony and only discuss *taʿlīq* and *samāʿ*. The purpose of contracting a *sharb al-sār* is to allow a trial period before the teacher and student make a more committed attachment. As described in chapter two, this type of initiatory union is modeled on marriage to a slave girl.

The way the *sharb al-sār* ceremony is generally conducted is as follows: at the end of a communal meeting, the youth seeking attachment, who would not have been allowed to be present during the prayers, enters the room and stands before the congregation. According to the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, the *naqīb* helps the student perform a ritual ablution and then perfumes him with incense.[325] These preparatory rituals impress upon the student the sanctity of the occasion on which his old self is cleansed in preparation for his rebirth as a believer. Since the student does not have prior experience with Nuṣayrī rituals, the *naqīb* stands beside him and guides him through the ceremony, feeding him his lines and instructing him how to act.

Placing Sandals on the Head

The ceremony always begins with the student assuming a posture of humility. In most instances, the youth is made to place the sandals of the congregation over his head. This sign of obeisance is already found in the *K. al-Ḥāwī* of al-Tabarānī who insists that every student, "young or old, noble or lowly," must submit to this humbling ritual before being allowed to drink the *sār*.[326] Placing sandals above the head also appears as an element of early initiation in the

[325] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 214. While not explicitely mentioned in this survey, all of the initiatory ceremonies as described in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* open this way.

[326] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 54.

Sharḥ al-imām, although here it is described as part of the *taʿlīq* ceremony, which is usually considered the second stage of initiation.[327] Since the *Sharḥ al-imām* does not include instructions for a *sharb al-sār* ceremony and only explains what must be done for *taʿlīq* and *samāʿ*, it is possible that the customs associated with the first stage of initiation were conflated with those of the second.

Sulaymān al-Adhanī's first stage of initiation, which he calls *al-Mashwara* (the deliberation) but which is identical with the *sharb al-sār*, also began with this humiliating pose. In the *K. al-Bākūra*, he relates how he was asked by the imam to place the sandals of the congregation upon his head. Instead of agreeing, he replied that he would only accept the sandals of his particular *sayyid*. His defiance of the *qānūn* was greeted with laughter. The imam let him have his way, allowing him to display obeisance to his *sayyid* alone.[328] It appears that in this first official encounter between the future apostate and the community of initiated believers, the consequences of Sulaymān's defiant behavior could not yet be conceived. It also shows that despite the strict conformity to the *qānūn* required in the instructional manuals, in practice, a certain flexibility was permitted to enter into the initiation ceremony.

The only description of a *sharb al-sār* ceremony that does not include the placing of sandals above the student's head is that found in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*. According to that account, the student must stand before the congregation of believers and prostrate himself three times. Despite the difference in the posture, the intention is clearly identical. The purpose of both the placing of sandals and prostration is for the novice to demonstrate his subjection to the community of believers. Before progressing to even the lowest level of initiation, the student

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[327]MS Arabe 1450, 158b.

[328] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 5-6.

must acknowledge that whatever his position may be in the outside world, within a religious community he has no status and is ready to serve and be molded by those above him. As al-Ṭabarānī explains in the *K. al-Ḥāwī*, "it is not possible to enter this house except through the gate of humility… as God says (Q2: 58), 'enter the gate with humility,' in posture and in words, 'and we shall forgive you your faults and increase (the portion of) those who do good.'"[329]

The Request to be initiated into the Light

After the student has demonstrated his subordination and his willingness to learn, he announces his intention to choose a *sayyid* from among the ranks of the initiated who can conduct him "from the confounding darkness and ignorance to the light of (divine) guidance and understanding."[330] The analogy between darkness and ignorance, and between light and understanding, is fundamental to Nuṣayrī beliefs and is repeated throughout the various stages of initiation. In several of the accounts, the transition is acted out symbolically by covering the student with a handkerchief that is removed as he progresses to the next level of initiation. In Sulaymān's *sharb al-sār* ceremony, the handkerchief was held above the sandal he was made to place over his head.[331] In the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, the handkerchief is employed during the *taʿlīq* ceremony where it is draped over the joined hands of the student and *sayyid*. As it is removed, the imam recites the Quranic verse (50: 22): "but now We have lifted from thee thy veil, and sharp is thy sight today!"[332] This literal performance of the removal of the veil of

[329] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 70.

[330] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:,* 214.

[331] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 3.

[332] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215-6.

ignorance symbolizes the transition of the student from spiritual darkness to the light of religious clarity.

Light and the Drinking of ʿAbd al-Nūr

For Nuṣayrīs, light is not merely significant as an analogy to religious knowledge; it is sacred in and of itself. This is because the deity, namely ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, is believed to be manifest in light. Thus the transition from darkness to light, which occurs through initiation, epitomizes the novice's acceptance of ʿAlī as God. Although he may not yet understand the significance of this belief, the novice is made to act it out in the main feature of the *sharb al-sār* ceremony. This is the drinking of the consecrated wine called *ʿabd al-nūr* meaning "servant of the light" which occurs as soon as the student has chosen his *sayyid* from among the crowd of gathered believers.

Al-Ṭabarānī explains that wine is called by this peculiar designation because when God created heaven, he made four rivers run through it, one of milk, one of water, one of honey, and one of wine. But he made the river of wine particularly luminous. When the angels asked about the content of the sparkling river God replied, "I am the light and this is my servant," from which wine received its name.[333] The primary way that wine functions as the servant of God is as a medium through which ʿAlī shows himself to humanity. In a sense then *ʿabd al-nūr* is also the material manifestation of the *bāb*, the aspect of the deity that connects humanity with the divine. As al-Ṣādiq is supposed to have taught, "the *ʿabd* is our servant the *bāb*, who is Salmān, and the *nūr* is my light."[334] But if the conduit is the *bāb,* then the content is the *maʿnā.* Therefore

[333] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*, 146. Also in *Majmūʿ al-Akhbār*, 136.

[334] *Majmūʿ al-Akhbār*, 136.

ingesting this sacred substance literally introduces the deity into the physical body of the believer. This is why the ritual drinking of wine recurs in all Nuṣayrī religious gatherings. It is a concrete testimony to their belief in God and his manifestation on earth.

The congruence between the deity and wine is apparent in heaven from their shared luminosity. But on earth, it is a secret known only to believers. According to the *K. taʿlīm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya*, the catechism of the Nuṣayrī religion introduced in the previous chapter, " the veiling of our Lord in light…and his manifestation in his servant, *ʿabd al-nūr*" is "the mystery of mysteries and the chief article of faith of the true believers."[335] As a substance that encapsulates God's contradictory nature, i.e. his incorporeality as well as his physical manifestation, *ʿabd al-nūr* represents the duality that governs all of existence. In this same catechism *ʿabd al-nūr* is described as "the mystery of the Two (*sirr al-thintayn*)," which a gloss in the margins of the manuscript elaborates is "the mystery of good and evil, the mystery of light and darkness, the mystery of water and fire, the mystery of flesh and blood, the mystery of food and drink, the mystery of death and life, the mystery of heat and cold, and the mystery of Nawrūz and Mihrajān."[336] The transmission of this great mystery to the next generation is what is celebrated in the *sharb al-sār* ceremony.

Nuṣayrīs do not discount the Quranic prohibition of drinking alcohol. However, they believe that it only applies to non-believers who are unworthy of experiencing the miracle of God's transubstantiation in wine. Al-Ṭabarānī explains that partaking of the *ʿabd al-nūr* is

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[335] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 279. The Arabic text as well as an annotated translation of this catechism can be found in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 163-221.

[336] Idem, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 193. The drinking of *ʿabd al-nūr* has traditionally been understood by western scholars as a Christian element in the Nuṣayrī religion. However, the theology of light and dualism at the core of the ritual, and the role that Nawrūz plays in the consecration of the wine, points to an Iranian origin to the ceremony. Moreover, as Michael Barry has suggested, wine as a symbol of divine light has ancient roots in Iranian and Babylonian iconography.

prohibited to non-initiates; it is even forbidden for Nuṣayrīs to drink it in the presence of non-believers. In the *K. al-Dalāʾil fī al-Masāʾil* al-Ṭabarānī cites the maxim of al-Khaṣībī, "[wine] is permissible to you while you are amongst yourselves but prohibited to you amongst others. There are two kinds of wine, permissible wine and prohibited wine. What is permissible is drinking with the believers and what is prohibited is drinking with the unbelievers and opponents." [337] The novice seeking to be confirmed in *sharb al-sār* does not yet have any knowledge of Nuṣayrī beliefs and should not otherwise be allowed to partake of the *ʿabd al-nūr*. However, through attachment to a believer, the student is permitted to experience the mystery under the sponsorship of his *sayyid* who allows him to drink a remnant of his *ʿabd al-nūr* in his name and with his permission. It is only later, after he has completed his course of education and become fully initiated, that the student earns the right to drink the *ʿabd al-nūr* for himself.

Once the student has drunk the wine, the *sharb al-sār* ceremony is concluded. The student is reminded not to reveal to outsiders what occurred during the ceremony. He kisses the hand of his *sayyid* and then leaves the room, allowing the full members of the community to conclude their business.[338]

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[337] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*, 146. See also Rudolph Strothmann, "Seelenwanderung bei den Nuṣairī," *Oriens* 12(1959): 107; Idem, *Esoterische Sonderthemen bei den Nusairi* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), 24. For an in-depth discussion of the prohibition of drinking alcohol with non-initiates see al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 137-41.

[338] The novice may not remain in the room while the believers pray until he is fully initiated. This is primarily in order to withhold the deeper secrets of the religion from the student until he has proven worthy, but also because at this stage he is considered to be a woman and may not pray with the men. In fact, if a believer would touch a student during prayer, it would violate his status of ritual purity, just as would touching a (biological) woman. Only after he has left does the *naqīb* announce the call to prayer, the believers complete their ritual ablutions, and the congregation begins praying. See al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 73.

The *Taʿlīq* Ceremony

If the student is found worthy he progresses to *taʿlīq* (attachment), the second stage of Nuṣayrī initiation. *Taʿlīq* is sometimes referred to simply as *ʿaqd*, meaning contract, the drawing up of which is the main feature of the ceremony. In the Lyde and *STA K. al-Mashyakha* the contract is explicitly called *aqd ʿa-m-s* and given the sobriquet "the weapon of the pious."[339] The name of the contract probably derives from the fact that it is sealed with the utterance of *sirr ʿa-m-s*, the mystery (of the unity) of ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Fārisī, which is first revealed to the student during the *taʿlīq* ceremony. In the *K. al-Bākūra*, Sulaymān al-Adhanī describes how he was instructed to utter the phrase *sirr ʿa-m-s* as he drank the *abd al-nūr* during this ceremony and directed to henceforth repeat the expression five hundred times a day, almost like a Sufi *dhikr.*[340]

In the *K. al-Ḥawī* and in the *Sharḥ al-imām*, *taʿlīq* is explicitly structured as a wedding ceremony but in the Lyde and *STA K. al-Mashyakha* the *ʿaqd* is simply a contract that spells out the mutual rights and responsibilities of the student and *sayyid*. Whatever the form, the contract drawn up during *taʿlīq* establishes a permanent attachment between the student and his teacher and allows them to commence a course of religious education which, if successful, leads to full-fledged membership in the sect. It also activates the bonds of consanguinity described in the previous chapter, tying the novice into the Nuṣayrī community and establishing him within an intellectual lineage that traces back to the origins of the sect.

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[339] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215; ibid., 257; MS Lyde 17, 160. The *K. al-Bākūra* does not give details of a contract drawn during the second ceremony.

[340] Instruction to repeat the phrase *sirr ʿa-m-s* five-hundred times daily can also be found in MS Taymūr, *ʿAqāʾid* 564: 31.

The ceremony of *taʿlīq* is accompanied by a celebration, which may be open to all members of the sect and not merely to the initiated. The details of this celebration are not discussed in the sources although mention is made of the great expense the novice undergoes in sponsoring the party.[341]

The Petition

As in the *sharb al-sār* ceremony, the student must announce his desire to be initiated. It is important that the request come from the student. Embarking upon a course of initiation is considered a grave and difficult matter, and it is something that the student must enter of his own accord. This view is best epitomized by the *ḥadīth* that recurs, almost as a mantra, throughout *samāʿ,* the third ceremony of Nuṣayrī initiation but which is relevant for these earlier stages as well: [342]

> Our secret is a concealed secret, difficult and extremely arduous; none can bear it but an angel who is close [to God], or a prophet who is an apostle, or a believer whose heart has been tested with faith; for the angels are many but none of them can bear our doctrine but those who are close; and the prophets are many, but none of them can bear our doctrine but those who are apostles; and the believers are many but none of them can bear our doctrine but those who are tested.

This *ḥadīth*, which can also be found in Imāmī works, [343] is attributed to the Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir and is probably the most important and oft-repeated saying in all Nuṣayrī

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[341] MS Arabe 1450: 158b-59a. I have been in contact with Muharrem Erdam, a master's student in the sociology department at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara who has been doing field research among the Alevis (Nuṣayrīs) around Mersin, Turkey. He informed me that an animal is sacrificed for the celebration and that there is even a charitable foundation that helps sponsor the celebration if the family of the student cannot afford to pay.

[342] This formulations of the *ḥadīth* can be found in MS Lyde 17: 165-7; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 260. Similar versions can be found in MS Arabe 1450: 163a; al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5.trans. in ; Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 231-2; *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 217. See discussion of this *ḥadīth* below.

[343] For some Imāmī versions of this *ḥadīth* see, al-Ṣaffār, *Faḍāʾil Ahl al-Bayt al-musammā bi- Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Nuʿmān li-l-ṭibāʿa wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ, 1992), 37-44; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*: I: 401-2; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*: I: 28-9, 320-1, 39.

discussions of secrecy. It stresses the magnitude of the charge placed upon the student seeking access to esoteric knowledge which none but the most confirmed believers can carry.

As is pointed out in the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha,* the student's position prior to initiation is free, but if he has heard the secret and fails to properly guard it from the unworthy, he will be held accountable both here and in the hereafter.[344] For this reason, the imam officiating over the ceremony must guarantee that the contract is "free and unconstrained" and that it is drawn with "mutual consent and with freedom of determination" of the two partners.[345] The punishments associated with revealing the secret are enumerated during *samāʿ* when the student makes his official pledge of secrecy. But even in these earlier ceremonies the volition of the student seeking to be attached is stressed. The novice must ask to be initiated. He must choose his own *sayyid* from among the crowd and must agree to submit to his guidance.

The *Sharḥ al-imām* describes the most elaborate version of the student's petition although its main elements are echoed in the other texts. According to the *Sharḥ al-imām* the student is made to stand before the community at the right side of the *naqīb*. His head must be uncovered and if he hasn't already shown his submission through placing the sandal of his *sayyid* above his head, he does so now.[346] With the guidance of the *naqīb*, the student turns to the congregation and says: [347]

> I request of you, o congregation, in the manner in which one petitions God (for that is the perfect manner) to ask my shaykh and *sayyid* [whom he vocally names] to accept me as a servant and slave, to purify me from the defilement of polytheism and *shnbwyh* (شنبويه), to lead me from the darkness of error, and guide

[344] MS Lyde 17, 165; trans, in Lyde, *Asian* Mystery, 260.

[345] MS Lyde 17, 157; trans. In Lyde *Asian Mystery*, 256; *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 215.

[346] MS Arabe 1450, 158b.

[347] Ibid.

> me to the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). May God grant you success and make you worthy of every good.

The various elements of this petition allude to important Nuṣayrī doctrines, many of which the student will only understand after his education has commenced. For example, the expression "in the manner in which one petitions God," which opens his request, refers to the roles played by the imam, *naqīb*, and *sayyid* in the ceremony. During the student's initiation these characters stand in the position of the three historical manifestations of the Nuṣayrī trinity, ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Farisī respectively. So when the student asks them to initiate him into the secrets of the sect, it is as if he is speaking directly to the Godhead. And when they admit him, give him *ʿabd al-nūr* to drink, and transmit to him esoteric truths, it is as if he has been expressly welcomed into the saved community by the divine.

Out of respect for the loftiness of the two highest members of the trinity, the parallel between the *sayyid* and Salmān al-Fārisī, the lowest manifestation of God, is given the most attention in Nuṣayrī texts. In the theoretical section of his treatise, the author of the *Sharḥ al-imām* explains that the *sayyid*'s "position with respect [to the student] is like the position of the *sayyid* Salmān. For he is the one who is sent to them and who leads them and delivers them from error to right guidance and who benefits them with life and knowledge."[348] According to the sacred history of the Nuṣayrīs, Salmān acted as the gateway (*bāb*) through which mankind perceived the true divine nature of Muḥammad and ʿAlī. Likewise, in the context of Nuṣayrī initiation the *sayyid* is the counterpart of Salmān, functioning as the conduit through which the student can realize esoteric truths. By accepting this role the *sayyid* acquires a certain divinity of his own with relation to the student. As the imam informs the novice during the *samāʿ* ceremony,

[348]MS Arabe 1450: 162b.

"your *sayyid* is your Lord, your prophet, and your apostle. He is nothing but your God, your creator, and your sustainer."[349]

This analogy of the *sayyid*- student relationship to that of a deity and subject is similar to the more common metaphors of husband and wife and parent and child in that all three represent hierarchical structures in which there are nevertheless mutual responsibilities incumbent upon both parties. In the student's request to be initiated through *taʿlīq*, yet another analogy of this nature is adduced: that of a master and slave. In the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* the concept of servitude features as the thrust of the petition. The student is instructed to say: "I request of God and I request of you, o believers, in the manner in which one petitions God, that you ask my shaykh, my guide, my *sayyid*, the Shaykh (so-and-so), that he accept me as a slave and servant so that I may serve him for the remainder of my days, and you o believers are the people of right guidance and sincerity."[350] By requesting servitude in this fashion the student acknowledges his subordination to his *sayyid* just as he did when he placed his sandals over his head. However he is also recognizing the duties that will be incumbent upon him and which will be owed to him in return in the event that the *taʿlīq* is formed. It is his acceptance of these terms that make possible the achievement of the student's main objective, namely, to be cleansed of polytheism and *shnbwyh* [discussed below], to be guided out of intellectual darkness and onto the straight path of belief. These terms will be explained in what follows:

As is well known, Nuṣayrīs believe in a tri-partite God, consisting of a *maʿnā*, *ism*, and *bāb*, who repeatedly manifest throughout history in human form. Despite this fact, Nuṣayrīs insist that they are perfect *muwaḥḥidūn*, monotheists, and often call their religion *dīn al-tawḥīd*

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[349] Ibid., 165b.

[350] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215.

(the religion of monotheism). The student's request to be purified of the "defilement of polytheism" must be understood in this light. The seeming contradiction between the Nuṣayrī belief in a trinity and their self-perception as monotheists is resolved through the Neoplatonic theory of emanation according to which all creation represents a gradual progression from an abstract God. The first of these emanations are so close to the deity that they too are considered divine. So, for example, in the Nuṣayrī trinity, the *maʿnā* is the source but the *ism* and *bāb* are still part of the Godhead since they were the first and second creations to proceed from it. But as the emanations advance, they become earthly and material. In this way, everything in existence is essentially a part of the deity possessing greater or lesser spiritual rank depending on its proximity to the source. So when the student asks to be purified of the "defilement of polytheism" he is asking to be admitted into the ranks of the *muwaḥḥidūn*, those who understand the unity of all existence, which in Sufi terminology appears as *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

The student's request to be cleansed of *shnbwyh* (شنبويه) is harder to explain. The word is not found in any of the Arabic lexicons and has troubled earlier scholars of the field. Reading the word with an Arabic morphology (as *shunbuwiyya*), Matti Moosa and Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī assumed that it was a scribal error for *mushabbihiyya* (anthropomorphists).[351] This is quite a plausible error for a copyist to have made and their correction would certainly makes sense in this context where the student asks to be cleansed of his false beliefs. However, the word *shnbwyh* also appears in Lyde's *Mashyakha* suggesting that it is not a scribal error and must have its own meaning.[352] For his part, Lyde thought that *shnbwyh* might be a mistake for the Arabic

[351] Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*: 373. al-Ḥarīrī, *al-ʿAlawiyyūn al-nuṣayriyyūn* 85.

[352] MS Lyde 17: 162. Arabic MS 124 [722]: 50b. MS Arabe 6182, (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale), 31a.

"*shunbah*," a rare word for cold.[353] This reading would reference the condition of the unbeliever who is lost in the cold and dark world of polytheism.

In fact, the word is probably a rare derogatory nickname for one of the *rāshidūn* caliphs, most likely ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Like other Shiite groups, Nuṣayrīs preferred to call the first three caliphs, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān by pejorative code names.[354] Though *Shnbwyh* is not one of the familiar nicknames, it appears in al-Khasībī's *K. al-Hidāyā al-Kubrā* alongside the name Ḥabtar in an account where both Shnbwyh and Ḥabtar are cursed. [355] Ḥabtar, meaning fox, is a well-known derogatory nickname for Abū Bakr who, in Shiite thought, cheated ʿAlī of his rightful leadership of the community. So *Shnbwyh* is probably ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, whom Nuṣayrīs vilify as a manifestation of Iblīs on earth and the foremost enemy of the *ahl al-bayt*. If so, it is likely that the etymology of the word is not purely Arabic, but should rather be read as Arabic *shanab* with the Persian suffix *awayh* or *ūya*. In Arabic, *shanab* is a mustache and the Caliph ʿUmar is famous for having a large white mustache that he used to tug at when angered.[356] The name *Shanabawayh* or *Shanabūya* would therefore mean "the one with the mustache" and the student's appeal to be freed from him would express his desire to be purified of demonic Sunni ideas.[357]

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[353] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 258.

[354] For a discussion of these pejorative names see Etan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī view on the Ṣaḥāba," *JSAI* 5(1984): 162-5; Meir Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 115-18; Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 123.

[355] al-Khaṣībī, *K. al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, 45.

[356] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1976), 211-12; Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr* (Baghdad: al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya lil-Ṭibāʿa, 1978), I: 65.

[357] I have come across another fascinating idea behind the word *Shnbwyh* in an article by a Nuṣayrī shaykh on the Internet, but have not yet found corroboration in any Nuṣayrī books. This is that *Shnbwyh* was a Zoroastrian heretic contemporary with Mani who promoted the idea that Darkness preceded Light. The author of this article condemns *Shnbwyh*'s idea, insisting that Light came before Dark and that the latter was only introduced to the world through

The student's request to be led "out of the darkness of error" has already been explained in relation to the Nuṣayrī adoration of light. However, his desire to be guided along the *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, which might sound like a religious platitude, actually has a specialized implication in Nuṣayrī thought. The term *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, meaning the "straight path," appears throughout the Quran as a synonym for a righteous life. The most well-known example can be found in the *fātiḥa*, the opening chapter of the Quran, where believers ask God to, "Guide us in the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*); the path (*ṣirāṭ*) of those whom you have favored; not of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray."[358] In Islamic eschatology the *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is the hair-thin and razor-sharp bridge over hell that every man must cross on the day-of-judgment before gaining entry to paradise. The worthy will be ushered across while the sinful will tumble into the raging fires beneath.[359] But in the context of Nuṣayrī initiation, the *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* takes on a further meaning, namely, the path up seven spiritual ranks, which the novice begins to climb as he is inducted into the community of the saved.

Based on the doctrine of emanations described above, Nuṣayrīs classify the world into a hierarchy of spiritual and material ranks. Nuṣayrīs believe that in the pre-history of the universe, they belonged to the spiritual world and existed as bodies of light contemplating the divinity of ʿAlī. But as a punishment for their sins they were cast into material bodies and forced to endure *tanāsukh*, physical reincarnation into increasingly degrading forms. Only through gnosis and the assimilation of esoteric truths can believers gradually climb back up these ranks and return to the

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some kind of sin or fall. See http://freemoslem.com/showthread.php?p=1449. The presentation of the Nuṣayrī ideas about the precedence of light conforms to the published accounts of Nuṣayrī cosmology, but I could not find any other reference for this story of *Shnbwyh*.

[358] Quran 1: 6-7.

[359] See G. Monnot, "Ṣirāṭ," *EI2*.

spiritual world of lights.[360] In the *K. al-Ṣirāṭ*, attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, *bāb* 8 of the Nuṣayrī religion, the process by which the initiate can climb the spiritual ladder gradually becoming a *mumtaḥin* (tested), *mukhliṣ* (faithful), *mukhtaṣ* (authority), *najīb* (noble), *naqīb* (leader), *yatīm* (incomparable), and eventually *bāb* (gate) is explained in detail.[361] This process can occur over many lifetimes, but in exceptional cases a believer can complete this journey in one life, at which point he can shed his material body and fly instantaneously from one corner of the world to the next. He has no more need of food or sleep and is freed of any obligation to adhere to ritual laws. Most significantly, he can contemplate the *hijāb -ism* and through him the *maʿnā* without the limitation of his material body.[362] By petitioning the congregation in this manner, the student takes his first step upon the *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* and begins his spiritual journey back to his pre-material state.

Khuṭba and ʿAqd

The congregation passes along the student's request and, if the *sayyid* agrees, the two sit holding hands before the imam who recites a *khuṭba* (sermon) in their honor before officially sealing them in the *ʿaqd*. There are two very different traditions for this part of the ceremony. The one that is probably older is found in the *Sharḥ al-imām* and derives from the *K. al-Ḥāwī* of al-Ṭabarānī, which portrays *taʿlīq* as a marriage between master and disciple. The second tradition is described in the Lyde and *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, which in this instance differ in certain places but clearly derive from the same text. Unfortunately, the *K. al-Bākūra* does not

[360] Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 115-18.

[361] Al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, *Kitāb al-Ṣirāṭ*, ed. Al-Munṣif ibn ʿAbd al-Jalīl (Beirut: Dar al-Madār al-Islāmī 2005), 72-80.

[362] Ibid., 80-5.

include information about how the ʿ*aqd* between Sulaymān and his *sayyid* was formed. It is likely that Sulaymān's ʿ*aqd* adhered more closely to that found in the *K. al-Mashyakha* since his ceremony included the utterance of *sirr ʿa-m-s* which is central to the *K. al-Mashyakha* account but is absent from that of the *Sharḥ al-imām*.[363] Since the *Sharḥ al-imām* probably represents an older tradition of initiation its *khuṭba* and ʿ*aqd* will be described first.

As alluded to above, the *khuṭba* in the *Sharḥ al-imām* of MS Arabe 1450 is somewhat cryptic, consisting of fragments of Quranic passages and *ḥadīth* without explanation. It is possible that these disconnected quotations were merely intended as speaking points for the imam who would then flesh them out at the ceremony. One can also imagine that the sermon included in the *Sharḥ al-imām* was intentionally structured in an abstruse manner to conceal esoteric truths from the novice at this early stage of his education. The overall reticence of the *Sharḥ al-imām* with regards to disclosing any religious secrets would support the latter theory. However, there is indication that the sermon included in the *taʿlīq* ceremony of Ms. Arabe 1450 is corrupted. Several lines in this part of the text do not make grammatical sense and appear to be mistranscribed. This might suggest that an older version of the *Sharḥ al-imām* would include a more elaborate *khuṭba*. However, since Ms Arabe 1450 is currently the only available version of the text, this theory cannot be confirmed. In my exposition of this *khuṭba* I will attempt to decipher the fragmentary statements so that their purport can be ascertained.

The imam begins by assuring the student that the ceremony he is about to undergo is divinely ordained through recitation of Quran 53:3-5, "He does not talk capriciously. It is an

[363] Although, in some respects the *K. al-Bākūra* is more similar to the *Sharḥ al-imām*, as for example in the placing of sandals which is absent from the *K. al-Mashyakha*, it is probable that Sulaymān's initiation was based on a disparate third tradition, as will be discussed later.

inspired revelation taught to him by one who is mighty."[364] In its traditional understanding, the Quranic verse was meant to exonerate Muḥammad who was plagued by accusations that the Quran was his own speech and not a divine revelation. But the imam officiating over the ceremony appropriates it for the context of initiation, which in Nuṣayrī thought is not structured according to human invention but based on *bāṭinī* readings of Quran and *ḥadīth*.

In order to validate this assertion the imam cites the *ḥadīth* of the prophet Muḥammad, "marry and procreate for I will take pride in you before the nations on the day of resurrection and judgment (*yawm al-qiyāma wa-al-dīn*)." To this *ḥadīth* he appends a phrase from Quran 3:18, "the angels and those of knowledge (*ulū ʾl-ʿilm*) stand firm (*qāʾimān bi-al-qisṭi*)." The imam clarifies that marriage in the *ḥadīth* "does not refer to a marriage of sexual intercourse (*nikāḥ al-jimāʿ*) but rather to a marriage of hearing (*nikāḥ al-samāʿ*)."[365] In other words, it is the swelling of the ranks of the believers through initiation (marriages of hearing) that will please the prophet

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[364] MS Arabe 1450: 158b. These Quranic verses and those surrounding them in *sūrat al-najm* (53) are also said during the Nuṣayrī mass recited before the drinking of *ʿabd al-nūr*. (See Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 245; MS Lyde 17: 125; Arabic MS 124 [722*]*: 39b; MS Arabe 6182: 22b.) Al-Khaṣībī teaches that these verses were revealed in honor of ʿAlī and as proof of his divinity. (See al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 32.) The story he tells is that a star descended upon ʿAlī's home in Medina, and when the people approached Muḥammad to learn the meaning of this event, he received the *surat al-najm*. The heresiographer Abū Tammām explains that the Mubayyiḍa, the followers of the heresiarch al-Muqannaʿ, employed this chapter (specifically Q53: 3-11) as the prooftext for their belief in divine incarnation. The Nuṣayrīs likely interpreted these verses in the same manner. Abū Tammām explains that the Mubayyiḍa believed that "Whenever God wants to speak to bodily creatures, He enters the form of one of them and makes it be a messenger to them, commanding them to do what he desires and intends or prohibiting them from what He does not want and is angry about. They support this by citing the statement of God, the mighty and glorious: "Nor does he say aught of desire; it is no less than an inspiration sent down to him, taught to him by one terrible in power and very strong; he stood poised" to His words: "then he approached and let Himself down" – which is to say, the Lord approached and let Himself down face to face with Muḥammad, may God bless him and his family—"two bows' length away or nearer" – meaning he was closer to Muḥammad than his own brain and heart which have for the brave the position of the arrow and bow—"then revealed to his servant what he revealed"—that is, He inspired Muḥammad to the point that He entered into his form—"the heart in no way counted fake what he saw"—which means the heart of his body did not deny when he saw Him enter into his physical frame—"will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw?"—i.e., will you contend with him and be envious that God preferred him by entering into his form and not entering into your form?" (See Madelung and Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography*: 75.) It is significant that during the Nuṣayrī mass this passage serves the same function of providing Quranic evidence for the belief in divine incarnation. The expression "two bows length away or nearer" is elsewhere interpreted by Nuṣayrīs as the distance between Muḥammad and ʿAlī. (See al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, 37.)

[365] This same *ḥadīth* and its interpretation can be found in al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 56.

at the end of days. The purpose of citing the *ḥadīth* and its interpretation is to set up the analogy to marriage that underlies *taʿlīq* and to assure the student that it is exactly his induction into the sect that will secure his position on the *yawm al-qiyāma*. This latter objective is the reason for the addition of Quran 3:18. The verse says that those who possess esoteric knowledge (*ulū ʾl-ʿilm*) will be *qāʾimān* (standing). The word *qāʾimān* echoes the *yawm al-qiyāma* of the *ḥadīth* and gives the impression that it is the religious knowledge he will access through an esoteric marriage with his *sayyid* which will entitle him to stand proud on judgment day.

Before formally contracting the bond, the imam makes sure, one last time, that the student really wants to proceed and is not merely going through with the *taʿlīq* because of the expense he has already incurred. The imam lets the student know that the congregation has gathered explicitly for the purpose of witnessing his marriage contract but that if he opts out, all of the funds he has spent on the celebration will be returned to him. He encourages the student not to make the decision based on financial concerns by citing a saying, which he ascribes to the prophet Muḥammad, "he who knows what is demanded of him, that which he sacrifices becomes easy for him. And he who sacrifices himself acquires himself."[366] [Then follows a line that I am unable to translate: وليس الناشي بانفس من قدس المعرفة ولا لك نفسً انفس من نفسك وما تشتمل عليه صورتك.[367]]

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[366] The imam ascribes this saying to the prophet Muḥammad. I have not found any Sunni or Shiite *ḥadīth* collection that confirms this attribution. The first part of it does appear as a maxim that the Sufi Ibrāhīm b. Adham wrote to Sufyān al-Thawrī in a letter. I am not sure if it is relevant but Ibrāhīm b. Adham is particularly revered by Nuṣayrīs who still visit his grave in the Syrian town of Jabala. (See Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints and Prophets*: 136.) The quotation of Ibrāhīm b. Adham is longer and reads: "he who knows what is demanded of him, that which he sacrifices becomes easy for him. He who frees his sight, his regret will be longstanding. He who frees his hope, his labor will worsen. He who frees his tongue, kills his soul". See al-Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-Imān* ---- It seems likely that the part of this saying which appears in the *Sharḥ al-imām* was originally a separate *ḥadīth* since the clauses that follow all adhere to a structure (he who frees…), which is absent from the first. The second half of the *ḥadīth* in the *Sharḥ al-imām* (he who sacrifices himself acquires himself) echoes Mark 8:35: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it".

[367] One of the many difficulties with this verse is how to read the word انفس. The fact that it is part of a discussion of spending money would suggest that it should be understood with a monetary implication as "the most expensive." Perhaps something like… "a person is not raised in the sanctity of knowledge by spending a lot of money for there is

The imam also gives an opportunity for any member of the community to voice concerns regarding the suitability of the match.

If no objections are raised the imam explains how an esoteric marriage will enable the student to become a member of the sect. He takes hold of the student's right hand and says:

> I join you in marriage by the order of God and by His will according to the tradition of his apostle, [to] the daughter of my master (*karīmat mawlāyā*),[368] so-and-so for [the purpose of] what God has entrusted in him for you. This is a trusteeship that conveys to the will of God by being revealed to the worthy.[369] Indeed, God has established something in you, there is no doubt; it is the light of knowledge and the truth of belief. This light will continue to increase and grow in [your] soul and [your] sanctity will increase and [your] desire to attain [your] due. For [your] soul is thirsty to claim [your due] and to be ready for [your *sayyid*'s] words. For this is [the true meaning] of the implantation of sperm and the developing of the fetus. As God says, "his mother bore him painfully and delivered him painfully."[370] This [Quranic verse] refers to delivering the light of the sanctity of knowledge. It refers to educating [the] soul and developing [the] mind. It refers to the actualization of lights which God, may he be exalted, has established in you through this [union].

With this explanation the student learns that the esoteric marriage is contracted for the express purpose of legitimating the transmission of the *ʿilm al-bāṭin*, which is visualized as light. The

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nothing more valuable than your soul and what is encompassed in it is your form? There is a section in the *K. al-Ḥāwī* in which al-Ṭabarānī denounces all those who purposely take on wealthy students for the financial and social advantages it would provide to them. Could this line be implying something similar? N-f-s in the fourth form means to be envious of someone and *anfus* can mean evil eyes? There is no one who is envious of you who doesn't resemble you?? How about reading ولا as related to the root w-l-y? "A person cannot be raised in the sanctity of knowledge on his own. Befriend a soul that is more valuable than your own, and what is encompassed in him will be your form"?

[368] Alternately the expression *karīmat mawlāya* can mean the grace of my master, referring to Muḥammad or the *sayyid.* Two lines above on the folio it says زوجتك بكريمة مولايهذا فلان اذي اعنى السيّد but it is unclear if the expression "by this he means the *sayyid*" refers to the كريمة مولاي or the فلان. In the *K. al-Mashyakha* the term مولاي clearly refers to God. The imam says "you my master (مولاي) are the one who bestows grace upon the believers and vengeance upon the unbelievers."*STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 216.

[369] These first lines are roughly translated. The Arabic is probably corrupted and reads, زوّجتك بأمر الله ومشيّتهُ متيّع لسنّة رسولهُ كريمة مولاي فلان الي ما استودعهُ الله لك عنده وهي امانةٍ مبلغةٍ الي امر الله بايها ابدا الي اهلها . According to the recommendation of Michael Cook, I have corrected the last bit (بايها ابدا الي اهلها) as بانها ابداء الي اهلها.

[370] Q46: 15.

transfer of this light is the *bāṭinī* meaning of sexual intercourse. The two are similar in that both require an exclusive union to be contracted before they are shared and, more importantly, both have the mysterious power to create new life. Just as sperm, when implanted in the woman's womb, can gradually develop into a child, so the light of religious knowledge, which is communicated during *taʿlīq*, can take root in the student's soul and turn him into a believer.[371] According to the imam, this idea is the *bāṭinī* meaning of the discussion of pregnancy and labor in Q46: 15.

The imam points out to the student that the amount of time it takes for belief to develop within a person echoes the length of pregnancy whose "minimum is six months, average is nine months, and maximum is four years."[372] Although it is expected that the student will complete his education within this time, the imam concedes that only God, who has predetermined all fates, knows exactly how long it will take to attain perfect belief. To support this sentiment the imam cites Q13: 39, "every fate is predestined and every predestined decree has a date and every date has a book (in which) God erases what he wills and confirms what he wills and with him is the mother of the book (*Umm al-Kitāb*)."[373] The inclusion of this verse in the sermon of the imam is significant. The prophet Muḥammad is believed to have made this very saying the centerpiece of his *khuṭba* at the wedding ceremony of his daughter Fāṭima to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[374]

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[371] Relevant to this idea is the report of al-Baghdādī that the fourth/tenth century heresiarch, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī "permitted sodomy, maintaining that it was the communication of light from the superior to the inferior." Shalmaghānī's sect, the Azāqira, were contemporaries of the early Nuṣayriyya and it appears that they held similar ideas about the equivalence of sperm and light. (Halkin, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*: 85.)

[372] According to the Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, and Shafiʿī legal schools, gestation can last four years.

[373] This verse is slightly misquoted. The author writes, "confirms what he wills" while the verse only says "confirms." In fact, several of the Quranic verses in this manuscript are misquoted, without significant differences in meaning. (See Q21:101 on fol 164a and Q3:187 on fol.166b).

[374] See al-Muwaffiq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī al-Khawārazmī, *al-Manāqib*. (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1411/1990-1), 336.

Considering the great mystical significance of the union of ʿAlī and Fāṭima in Shiite thought, it is not surprising that it would be referenced during the wedding ceremony that allows the neophyte access to these types of mysteries in the first place.

Having revealed to the student the truth of what occurs during initiation, the imam asks him if he will accept and be satisfied with the marriage to his *sayyid* with his entire being, with his "name, body, spirit, soul, intellect, mind, understanding, knowledge, belief, religion, earthly position, afterlife, secret, public and with everything that is encompassed in his form both in the exoteric and esoteric." If he accepts the union, the imam kisses him between his eyes and says to him, "May God bless you and your enterprise and may He facilitate your readiness to accept what you seek." He then recites to him Q9: 111, "God has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth in return for paradise." After the imam finishes his speech the *naqīb* instructs the student to kiss the hand, foot, and earth before his *sayyid* who then tells him to him to rise, wishing him success in his endeavor. With this, the *ʿaqd* is concluded and the two may commence their religious education, a process that begins immediately with the ceremonial drinking of *ʿabd al-nūr*, the final element of the *taʿlīq* ceremony, which will be described below.

The *khuṭba* and *ʿaqd* found in the Lyde and *STA K. al-Mashyakha* differ significantly from that in MS Arabe 1450. They do not mention marriage and moreover incorporate esoteric symbols and even explicit references to religious secrets, which are completely absent from the *Sharḥ al-imām*. This might testify to a deterioration in the stringency of the initiation process in which very little is revealed to the student in the early stages of his education. Since the *STA* version is more detailed, its contents will direct this discussion.

As in the previous account the *sayyid* and student take their seat before the imam. But in the *K. al-Mashyakha* the imam begins his sermon by draping a handkerchief over their joint

hands above which he holds a Quran[375] and below, a cup of *ʿabd al-nūr*.[376] These three elements probably represent the Nuṣayrī trinity. The Quran corresponds to ʿAlī, the *maʿnā* (meaning), the handkerchief represents Muḥammad who is the *ism-ḥijāb* (name-veil) behind which the *maʿnā* hides, and the cup of wine symbolizes Salmān al-Fārisī, the *bāb* (door) through which humanity accesses the Godhead. These three symbols remain in place throughout the *khuṭba* as witnesses to the contract. Again the imam invokes the trinity by repeating three times the phrase, "In the name of God, the preexistent *maʿnā*, the great *ism,* and eternal *bāb*, shall I make a contract between the two of you?"[377] Upon their consent he recites: [378]

> In the name of God and by God, I contract between the two of you, with your consent and acceptance, a bond to God and his prophet in the dome (*qubba*) of Abel, Seth, Joseph, Joshua, Simon, and Ḥaydar.[379] [In] the mission of Muḥammad, the proclamation (*nidāʾ*) of the *bāb*, the connection of the higher and lower worlds, and the support of the Khaṣībī order regarding knowledge of the author of creation. I have taken the oath from the two of you, an oath to God and his covenant which was made by his righteous prophets, his missionaries, the speakers, a bond that cannot be undone all of the long years forever.

The invocations that open the *khuṭba* already assume significant knowledge of the divine mystery at the heart of the Nuṣayrī religion. Nuṣayrīs divide human history into cycles, which they often call *qibāb* (domes). In each one of these domes the trinity is believed to have

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[375] Perhaps it is the *K. al-Majmūʿ*. The text simply says *maṣḥaf* so the natural assumption is that it's a Quran. Evidence for it being the *K. al-Majmūʿ* is that the student is made to swear on the *Majmūʿ* during the *samāʿ* ceremony. See al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 6.

[376] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215.

[377] Ibid.

[378] Ibid. A simpler version of this invocation appears in the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha*: "In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful! In the name of the ancient *maʿnā*, the great *ism*, and the lasting *bāb*, and the high road of those rightly directed, and the eye of certainty, and the foundation of religion, I make between you (with your mutual consent, and with freedom of determination, with respect to what you are mutually agreed upon before these present notables) a free and not a constrained contract" See MS Lyde 17: 157; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 256.

[379] This is a nickname for ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib who is compared to a lion because of his extraordinary bravery and strength. In Nuṣayrī texts he is often depicted riding on a lion.

appeared on earth. The purpose of their repeated manifestation is to grant humanity the opportunity to recognize their divine nature and thereby escape the cycle of physical devolution that governs human existence. Generally the *qubba* is called by the name of the second member of the trinity, the *ḥijāb-ism* who always manifests himself as the speaking lawgiver, the one who in Ismāʿīlī terminology is called the *nāṭiq*. In Ismāʿīlī thought the *nāṭiq* is always accompanied by a *ṣāmit*, a silent prophet who discloses the esoteric meanings of the revealed laws. But in Nuṣayrī thought, where the esoteric holds greater significance than the exoteric, the seeming prominence of the *nāṭiq* is part of the divine strategy to conceal esoteric truths from the unworthy. By revealing the exoteric law the *hijāb-ism* hides the superior nature of the *maʿnā* and thereby protects the esoteric wisdom that proceeds from him. So for example, the *qibāb* are usually called by the names of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad who revealed the exoteric laws to the world. But in this instance where the neophyte is initiated into the mysteries of the faith, the imam calls the *qibāb* by their true designations, by the names of Abel, Seth, Joseph, Joshua, Simon, and Ḥaydar (ʿAlī) who were the true masters of each dome.

His purpose in calling upon the various characters in whom the *maʿnā* was manifest is to highlight the permanence of the union which he specifies is a "bond that cannot be undone all of the long years forever." It might also be an allusion to the belief reported of the followers of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muʿāwiya (the Janāḥiyya), an earlier group with whom the Nuṣayrīs share material, that true believers reappear on earth together in every cycle. Al-Nawbakhtī writes that the followers of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muʿāwiyya "claim to recognize each other in their various incarnations in every form from the [incarnations] in which they used to be with Nūḥ (Noah) on the boat and with (every) prophet in every age and time. They call themselves by the names of

the companions of the prophet(s) and claim that their spirits are incarnate within them."[380] If this idea underlies the imam's assertion that the ʿ*aqd* stands in all the domes of history then the implication would be that the *sayyid* and student also return and are bound together in every incarnation.

The First Requirement of Taʿlīq: Ritual Observance

According to the imam, the first term of the covenant of *taʿlīq* is not unique. It is the same condition that was demanded of the prophets and missionaries of God throughout history. This is that the two "uphold the divine ordinances (*ḥudūd allāh*) which He commanded of you to uphold and repress the inclination to oppose God."[381] At first sight, these instructions, appearing at the end of a long and esoteric prelude in the imam's *khuṭba*, are somewhat anti-climatic. The obligation to keep the law and oppose evil is explicit in the Quran and obligatory upon all Muslims, even the Sunnis and Shiites who merely adhere to its exoteric form. It is not something that should necessitate additional oaths. Nevertheless the requirement to adhere to Islamic precepts is given first priority in this and every other account of Nuṣayrī initiation.[382] This obligation is most unambiguously formulated in the *Sharḥ al-imām* where at the conclusion of the *samāʿ* ceremony the student is made to swear that he will "uphold the prayers at their times, give the alms to those who deserve it, fast in the month of Ramadan, conduct the pilgrimage to the house of God if [he] has the means, fight a true holy war for God, befriend His friends and

[380] al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, 60.

[381] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215; MS Lyde 17, 157-8.

[382] The exception is Sulaymān al-Adhanī's initiation in the *K. al-Bākūrā.* Since Sulaymān does not describe the terms of his contract, it is impossible to know whether this feature was actually absent, or if he just neglected to mention it.

show enmity to His enemies exoterically and esoterically in secret and in public."[383] The student is also informed that he will have to pay a fifth of his earnings, known as the *khums*, to the imam or his representative.[384] This list of ritual obligations does not display any Nuṣayrī particularity and might appear in any Shiite work. It is therefore not immediately obvious why it should receive so much attention at the heart of what is such a sectarian and decidedly *bāṭinī* ceremony.

What is even more striking about the exhortations to ritual observance in the accounts of initiation is that they seemingly refute the universal claims of Sunni and Shiite scholars that the *ghulāt* sects do not adhere to the laws of Islam on the grounds that their gnosis has freed them from any obligation to ritual observance. [385] This charge is not merely polemical slander; numerous statements found in the most sacred books of the Nuṣayrī religion corroborate it almost verbatim. For example, the *K. al Haft*, which is believed by Nuṣayrīs to preserve the esoteric statements of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq to his disciple al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar, includes an almost identical formulation of the antinomian stance recorded by the heresiographers. In a chapter

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[383] MS Arabe 1450, 166b.

[384] Ibid., 166a.

[385] The sectarian rationale for this antinomianism is reported in greatest detail by the heresiographer al-Qummī who writes with regards to the Mukhammisa, a grouping to which the Nuṣayriyya belonged, "They claim that whoever knows [the religious ranks] with these meanings is a 'tested believer' and is unburdened of all of the laws and the enslavement is dissolved. They permit him everything that God prohibited in his book and by the word of his prophet. [They claim] that these prohibitions are [codenames for] men and women of the people of rejection and denial, whom they have associated with [the various obligations]. Everything that God commanded such as prayer, alms, pilgrimage, fasting and worship are burdens and chains and they are only incumbent upon the people of rejection as a punishment for them. The prohibitions of fornication, alcohol, usury, stealing, sodomy, and all of the grave sins, and likewise, ritual ablutions before prayer, after sexual contact, and with sand: all these refer to dissociating and befriending men and women and if you have forbidden yourself from befriending them and have avoided them, then you have avoided what God has prohibited." (See al-Qummī, *K. al-Maqālāt*: 57-8.) Some iteration of this same rationale is reported of all the *ghulāt* sects discussed in the various heresiographies. However this entry of al-Qummī refers specifically to the Mukhammisa, those who show excessive reverence to the five members of the holy family, Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. According to Halm, this label did not actually refer to a particular sect but rather to a wider religious trend to which the Nuṣayriyya belonged. See Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten'" (1981), 61-4. As will be shown in this chapter, almost every one of al-Qummī's details about Mukhammisa beliefs can be corroborated by direct quotes from extant Nuṣayrī texts.

dedicated expressly to the question of whether a true believer must adhere to the ritual law once he has attained gnosis of the spiritual ranks al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said: [386]

> He who knows the esoteric knowledge is freed of the obligation to adhere to the exoteric works. But he who still does not know the ranks and has not attained them with his knowledge, he is in the exoteric world. But if he has attained them and if he knows them, level-by-level, and rank-by-rank, then he is freed. Servitude has fallen away from him and through his attainment and gnosis he has exited from the level of slavery to the level of freedom.

In this statement, al-Ṣādiq releases believers from the obligation of ritual observance. This exemption proceeds from two interrelated ideas about the function of the law. The first is that the law is purely utilitarian and is intended to bring one closer to God. Al-Ṣādiq adduces Q53: 42: "and to your Lord is your final goal" to support this view. But if one has already attained gnosis of God, then the obligation to adhere to Islamic law is redundant. As al-Ṣādiq is supposed to have explained, "if a man knows his Lord, then that which was demanded has been completed and there is nothing that allows one to reach God more than [knowledge of] the unity of God and knowledge of [other] esoteric truths."[387]

This first idea articulated by al-Ṣādiq is not necessarily antinomian but merely proposes that gnosis is an alternate way to achieve imminence with the divine. But al-Ṣādiq also articulates a more extreme and decidedly negative formulation of the function of the law. This is that the ritual law is a form of slavery that was imposed upon the unbelievers as a penalty for their failure to acknowledge the true divine nature of the Imams. According to this position vis-à-vis the law, all those who have achieved pure belief need not suffer the punishment of ritual obligations and are freed of the law. As al-Ṣādiq says, "the shackles were put on those who limit

[386] al-Juʿfī, *K. al-Haft*, 53.

[387] Ibid., 53-4.

God (*al-muqaṣṣirūn*). But the one who has reached and attained gnosis of these levels…has been emancipated from slavery. The chains and shackles [and the obligation to] uphold the exoteric have been removed from him."[388]

As a prooftext for this antinomian position al-Ṣādiq cites Q5: 93: "Those who believe and do righteous deeds incur no sin by what they ate, so long as they are conscious of God and believe and do righteous deeds, and continue to be conscious of God and to believe, and grow ever more conscious of God, and persevere in doing good, for God loves the doers of good."[389] In the Qurʿān, which explicitly prohibits the eating of blood, pork, carrion, and alcohol, this verse is difficult to understand. The verse has traditionally been interpreted as a proclamation that believers will not be held accountable for their actions before they became Muslims provided that they now act in accordance with the law. In the *K. al-Haft*, al-Ṣādiq interprets the verse literally to mean that perfect believers need not adhere to the ritual law as their faith has freed them from the legal restrictions imposed upon the non-believers.[390]

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[388] Ibid., 54. Al-Qummī reports that a group of them believed that these [ritual obligations] only obligated those who limit (*muqaṣṣira*) when they didn't acknowledge that Muḥammad was the creator, originator, and founder to whom the creation of beings was delegated. When they denied this they were required to perform the duties and these are the burdens and chains (*al-aghlāl wa-l-aṣār*). They were obliged to do these as a punishment. They [the Mukhammisa] base this idea on the word of God, "But if you fail to do it and God turns unto you in His mercy, remain but constant in prayer and render the alms" (58:13) and humble yourselves with bending and bowing and submission to the foundations of a wall.

[389] Ibid.

[390] In this same chapter al-Ṣādiq quotes another Qurʿānic verse to support the antinomian ideal: Q24: 29, "there is no sin upon you if you enter uninhabited houses for your pleasure. God knows what you reveal and what you conceal" What the two verses have in common is the phrase *laysa junāḥun*, there is no sin, which is probably what made them attractive to advocates of antinomianism. The second verse does not appear in the heresiographical literature and may have been a less common citation in debates over Islamic law. As I suggest in the appendix on ritual libertinism, Q24: 29 may have been the prooftext for the Nuṣayrī law discussed by al-Ṭabarānī in the *K. al-Ḥawī* that believers are permitted to enter each others' homes uninvited and make use of their belongings.

The presence of this Qurʿānic reference in a sectarian text is extremely significant. It is the most oft-repeated argument for the antinomian stance attributed to the *ghulāt* in the various Sunni and Shiite heresiographies. The fact that it is actually employed in a Nuṣayrī text to promote the abandonment of Islamic law corroborates the heresiographers' accounts and makes one wonder how much of their description of sectarian libertinism was accurate and how much was merely polemical exaggeration and hearsay.

The second element of the heresiographical account of *ghulāt* antinomianism is that the sects reinterpret the ritual obligations and prohibitions of the Quran as names of men to whom believers must either show enmity or love. [391] This exegetical practice is also confirmed by Nuṣayrī texts, and is most famously represented by the *K. Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād* of al-Ṭabarānī in which every holiday in the Islamic calendar is made to stand for particular historical figures in the Sunni-Shiite drama.[392] So for example, Ramadan stands for ʿAbd Allāh, the father of the prophet, and the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr stands for Muḥammad, his son. This reinterpretation allows al-Ṭabarānī to minimize the importance of fasting during Ramadan in favor of rituals with a more sectarian agenda.[393] But the practice of identifying Quranic injunctions with names of men is an extremely old feature of Nuṣayrī esotericism and can already be found in the *K. al-Haft* where

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[391] See fn 384 above.

[392] This book, also known as *Sabīl rāhat al-arwāḥ wa-dalīl al-surūr wa-ʾl-afrāḥ ilā fāliq al-aṣbāḥ* was edited by R. Strothmann in *Der Islam* 27 (1944-1946) and also appears in *Silsilat al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī* III. Bar Asher and Kofsky dedicated a chapter to the subject of the *Majmūʿ al-Aʿyād*'s antinomian interpretation of Islamic festivals in their *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*, 111-152.

[393] The logic behind this equation is as follows: On a cosmic level, ʿAbd Allāh symbolizes silence. This is firstly because he is reported to have abstained from speech during this month but also because he represents a time of silence before the appearance of the deity and the revelation of the exoteric and esoteric law. Muḥammad, the vocal prophet who revealed the Qurʿān, is conversely characterized by speech. Equating the festivals with these characters allows al-Ṭabarānī to claim that the true obligation of Ramadan is to conceal the secrets of the religion from the uninitiated while the true celebration of the Fiṭr is the breaking of the silence and the public declaration of esoteric truths, which will occur at the end of days.

the reference to prayer and charity in Q19: 55 “He commanded of his people prayer and charity” is interpreted as a mandate to recognize the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Al-Ṣādiq is supposed to have explained, “Prayer [in the verse] means the Commander of the Faithful and charity means having knowledge of him.”[394]

According to the heresiographers, this exegetical practice allows the sectaries to disregard the literal meanings of the commandments by claiming that all laws in the Quran esoterically refer to the principal Shiite obligation of associating with the Imams and dissociating from their enemies. While this is undoubtedly true in the case of some Nuṣayrīs, there is ample evidence in the literature that others promoted adherence to the *ẓāhir* alongside the *bāṭin.* This aspect of the Nuṣayrī heritage has basically been ignored by the secondary scholarship, which has mainly focused on the antinomianism of the sect.[395] Since the initiation related texts studied in this chapter uniformly demand adherence to the law, it is worthwhile to collect and analyze these anecdotes so that we can understand what is really being demanded of the student during *taʿlīq*.[396]

The nomian tradition in Nuṣayrī literature is most strongly represented in the *Ḥaqāʾiq Asrār al-Dīn* of al-Ḥasan b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, an influential student of al-Khaṣībī whose descendants headed the Ḥarrānian branch of the sect in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. According to the author’s preface, the work is compiled from “close to one hundred and fifty books of *al-tawḥīd al-bāṭin* (esoteric unity) and one hundred and fifty books of *takhmīṣ*

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[394] al-Juʿfī, *K. al-Haft*, 52. This discussion in the *K. al-Haft* is repeated in al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, 108.

[395] One exception can be found in Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 131, where a more complex image of the Nuṣayrī relationship with *sharīʿa* is presented.

[396] Of course, one can always suppose that the student is being made to promise to uphold the esoteric interpretations of the laws, as understood by the sect. However, I do not believe that this is what is demanded here. The esoteric interpretations relate to knowledge the student will only learn later, and can therefore not be a precondition of *taʿlīq*.

(fivism), *tafwīd* (delegationism), *taqṣīr* (limitation), and *ʿilm al-ẓāhir* (exoteric wisdom)."[397] Al-Ḥarrānī's anthology is therefore an invaluable repository of *ghulāt* ideas, and includes many quotations from books that are otherwise no longer extant.

Numerous statements in this work promote adherence to the exoteric law as a precondition for salvation. For example, in one *ḥadīth*, al-Ṣadiq is reported to have claimed, "Whoever abandons the obligatory prayer exoterically and esoterically is guilty of unbelief and has associated with God that which has no power."[398] Responding specifically to the belief that Quranic precepts refer to names of men, al-Ṣādiq is made to explains that it is true that, "prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, washing after ritual impurity, and the like are [names of] men but whoever does not uphold its exoteric meaning, then from him the esoteric is not accepted." [399] In short, both exoteric observance and knowledge of esoteric truths are necessary for salvation.

A similar idea is proposed in another story in which al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar asks al-Ṣādiq why some believers are poor and others are wealthy. Al-Ṣādiq replies that those believers who are wealthy observed both the exoteric and esoteric laws and therefore merited wealth in this and the next world. The poor believers, however, only observed the esoteric law, and therefore suffer poverty in this world but will be saved in the next. [400] According to this story, only the esoteric

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[397] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, 12.

[398] Ibid., 110. This *ḥadīth* is quoted from a *K. al-Murshid* of Abū al-Layth Muḥammad al-Shāshī. A similar statement of al-Ṣādiq is that "whoever upholds the exoteric, God awards him with the exoteric and the esoteric and whoever abandons the exoteric, God deprives him of both the exoteric and esoteric," (see ibid., 169.)

[399] Ibid., 145.

[400] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*, 119-20. Also explained in this anecdote is why there are wealthy and poor unbelievers. The answer follows the same logic: wealthy unbelievers observe the exoteric law, but not the esoteric law, and so are rewarded in this world, but not the next. Poor unbelievers follow neither the exoteric or esoteric law and so are punished in this and the next world.

law is necessary for salvation, but God nevertheless expects adherence to the exoteric law and will punish non-observance with earthly poverty.

Interestingly, both the statements promoting antinomianism and those condemning the belief are supposed to have originated with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.[401] It is possible that they represent rival positions in Nuṣayrī history. From Nuṣayrī sources we learn that an antinomian faction did exist in the past. A story is told in the *Ḥaqāʾiq Asrār al-Dīn* in which Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq sends his companion Abū Khadīja to the believers of Madāʾin to inform them that they must uphold all the exoteric laws even after they have learned their esoteric meanings. Apparently, the Unitarians (*muwaḥḥidūn*) living in Madāʾin were neglecting the law and so Abū Khadīja was sent to warn them, "Whoever abandons the exoteric after God has informed him of the esoteric, God strips him of both the exoteric and esoteric."[402] Al-Ḥarrānī relates a further story of a group of Unitarians active a generation later that also "profess[ed] libertinism and abandon[ed] the obligations." When Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal,[403] who was the leader of the Unitarians at the time, heard about their behavior he became angry and in exasperation proclaimed, "God appeared in his essence so that His manners (*ādābihi*) can be imitated!"[404] By this he meant that if ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had wanted his believers to be libertines he would not have appeared in the form of a law-abiding Muslim. That he adhered to Islamic law requires that those who profess his unity and divinity do so as well.

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[401] For more on the appropriation of al-Ṣādiq by opposing doctrinal schools see Ron P. Buckley, "Ja'far al-Sadiq as a Source of Shi'i Traditions," *Islamic Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1999), 37-58.

[402] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, 146.

[403] He is the son of al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar and believed by Nuṣayrīs to have been the *bāb* of the ninth Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād.

[404] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*, 146.

It is obvious that both these stories were preserved by proponents of the law-abiding faction. But they nevertheless testify to the existence of an antinomian constituent within the movement. Moreover, the wildly libertine statements found in MS Taymūr *aqāʾid* 564, analyzed in the appendix to this dissertation, show that these types of ideas persisted among factions of the Nuṣayrī community well into the modern age. In light of this assessment, one might read the exhortations to ritual observance in the accounts of Nuṣayrī initiation as declarations of Nuṣayrī orthodoxy. At the moment when the novice first articulates his identity in the faith he is made to align himself with the correct believers; with those who adhere to both the exoteric and esoteric of the law instead of with those who discard the exoteric once they have been inducted into the esoteric.

There is an alternate theory that seeks to salvage the antinomian statements of al-Ṣādiq while still promoting a life of ritual observance. This theory proposes that both the nomian as well as the antinomian statements of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq are authentic, but that the former are merely an expression of his *taqiyya*, precautionary dissimulation, while the latter portray his true attitude towards the law. According to this theory, al-Ṣādiq understood that abandoning the law would endanger his followers, and so he preached adherence to the *ẓāhir* to protect believers from persecution by the exoteric majority. In other words, al-Ṣādiq's exhortations to legal observance do not represent his true attitude towards the law, which was antinomian and hostile, they are instead pragmatic solutions for how believers should survive in an unfriendly world.

The *Haqāʾiq Asrār al-Dīn* preserves a *ḥadīth* regarding the necessity of *taqiyya* that corroborates this idea. In it Jaʿfar al-Ṣadiq cautions al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar to "safeguard his religion." The way he is directed to do this is by "appearing to adhere to the ritual law (*iẓhār al-ʿibāda*)." Al-Ṣādiq explains that even though believers are not essentially obligated by the law, it

is nevertheless forbidden for a them to allow their neighbors or any of the *muqaṣṣira* see them violating exoteric prohibitions. In order to ensure that one does not transgress this instruction al-Ṣādiq recommends that believers educate themselves regarding the ritual obligations of Islam and mimic the behavior of the Imams who adhered to the law at all times. As al-Ṣādiq warns, "whoever of you displays anything other than what we display has opposed us and whoever opposes us exposes us."[405] Statements such as these suggest that although true believers are not required to adhere to the law, they should follow the example of the Imams in upholding the ritual observances in order to protect the community from exposure. In order to ensure that this dissimulation is well rehearsed al-Ṣādiq recommends that believers practice the exoteric law in private as well as in public. As al-Ṣādiq warns, "accustom yourselves to these chains in private so that you won't be tempted to oppose them in public. Uphold the ritual obligations and the manners (*taʾdīb*) and don't neglect them, for would any of you go out in the marketplace undressed?"[406]

The analogy between the ritual obligations and clothes introduced at the conclusion of this *ḥadīth* is famously repeated in the *K. al-Bākūra* in which al-Adhanī explains that Nuṣayrīs simulate other Muslims based on their belief that they "are the body and the rest of the sects are

[405] Ibid., 145.

[406] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 145. Al-Ḥarrānī also preserves a similar formulation from the (lost) *K. al-ṣirāt* of Isḥāq al-Aḥmar (the eponym of the Isḥāqīs), in which al-Ṣādiq explains that prayer is like clothes and whoever neglects prayer is naked, and would a person ever walk naked in the marketplace… He then expounds on the need for ritual observance as *taqiyya.* He says, "All of the exoteric ritual obligations are incumbent upon the people of exoteric [understanding] from the perspective of shackles, chains, and labor, which God will not accept because they were ignorant of God and did not know Him. But [the exoteric ritual obligations] are incumbent upon the people of esoteric understanding and divine knowledge for reasons of education, *taqiyya* (dissimulation), and upholding the exoteric. Whoever abandons it and neglects to uphold it according to this meaning has transgressed one of God's ordinances (*ḥudūd*) and neglected one of His obligations, namely, the obligatory *taqiyya* and the education commanded for it, (in God is success), unless you are of those who have a rank like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and Yaḥyā b. Umm al-Ṭawīl and the other people of [spiritual] rank. (ibid., 108.) This latter statement suggests a third possible solution to al-Ṣādiq's contradictory attitudes towards the law, namely, that the release from the law is only for the men of the highest ranks. Practically, however, this would not apply to the novice or, for that matter, to any contemporary Nuṣayrī, who would have to continue observing the law.

clothes and whatever type of clothing a person may put on, it does not injure him and whoever does not simulate like this is a fool for a sane person would not walk naked in the market."[407] According to this formulation of the Nuṣayrī attitude towards the law, believers are complete without observing the ritual commandments. However, they clothe themselves in ritual observance in order to protect their modesty i.e. the sacrality of their religion and to deflect unwanted attention from the surrounding Muslim population.

In this sense, the oaths to ritual observance that appear in the *taʿlīq* ceremony represent the student's acceptance of the fundamental Nuṣayrī practice of *taqiyya*. By swearing to observe the law, the novice is in essence agreeing to protect the sect from the negative attention it would receive from the *muqaṣṣira* were he to openly abandon the exoteric observance of Islamic precepts. Interpreting the student's oath in this way would explain its prominence in a ceremony meant to initiate a novice into an esoteric and persecuted sect such as the Nuṣayriyya. Before being granted access to the secrets of the sect, the student is made to swear that he will not do anything to endanger it.

This explanation seems to be the one favored by al-Ṭābarānī who writes in the *K. al-Ḥāwī*, particularly with reference to the initiation of new believers, that it is prohibited for believers to "give themselves over to *zandaqa* (dualist heresy) and display the abandonment of the obligations such as abandoning prayer and the fast, and engaging in excessive drinking and drunkenness. Whoever does this has dissociated from the protection of Ja'far and has exposed the believers to destruction."[408] In order to ensure that the novice does not "expose the believers to destruction," al-Ṭabarānī insists that he must learn the exoteric law before entering a course of

[407] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 82.

[408] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 70.

initiation. He writes, “it is not permitted for [a student] to drink the *sār* until he has learned the proper conduct of the religion (*adab al-dīn*). For the conduct of the religion comes before the religion and he who has no conduct has no religion and whoever does it differently has violated the moral law and has despised what God has deemed important.”[409]

Along this same vein, al-Ṭabarānī declares in his *K. al-Maʿarif*, "He is not one of us, who, being in a crowd of forty [Muslim] people, does not externally behave more piously than the rest of them,”[410] However, as Bar Asher and Kofsky have noted, in this work al-Ṭabarānī criticizes private observance of the ritual law, citing a *ḥadīth* attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq: “He who performs [the religious commandments] in secret is similar to him who publicly abandons them; and he who publicly abandons them is like him who performs them [in secret].” This statement obviously differs from the *ḥadīth* quoted above by al-Ḥarrānī that demanded private observance of the law as practice for the outside world. This difference of opinion is not necessarily surprising. One must always remember that a great diversity of opinions existed among the Nuṣayrīs. This diversity was a necessary corollary of the secrecy of the religion, which could not be effectively policed or standardized and inevitably fragmented into individual and local opinions. In any event, the student’s promise to observe the ritual law, whether for its own sake or for the sake of *taqiyya*, whether only in public or in private as well, is a serious oath and should not merely be dismissed as empty rhetoric.

The Second Requirement of Taʿlīq: The Mutual Responsibilities of the Mentorship

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[409] Ibid.

[410] Quoted in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, "Dogma and ritual," 63.

The first requirement of *taʿlīq* dealt with the ritual obligations that the initiate and his master owe to God and perhaps also to the larger community of believers whose secrets they swear to protect. However, there is also a second requirement that the partners must accept which focuses on the personal obligations that a student and *sayyid* owe to each other. The imam lists these requirements, described as rights (*ḥuqūq*) due from one member of the bonded pair to the other, during the *taʿlīq* ceremony.

It is important that the mutual responsibilities of *taʿlīq* are clarified to the partners before their union is officially sealed. This is not only so that the partners understand what they are getting into. It is also because once their *taʿlīq* is contracted the relationship between the *sayyid* and the student becomes an extremely private affair. External interference is then tantamount to meddling in the personal relationship of a husband and wife, and anything that might harm this relationship is discouraged. As al-Ṭabarānī writes in the *K. al-Ḥāwī*:[411]

> It is not permitted to estrange a student from his *sayyid* by any means, for that is [like] gazing at the wives of the believers, and whoever does this has gazed with the eye of desire, and his punishment is blindness in this world and the next, for God, may he be exalted says, "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity" (Q24: 30).

Believers are therefore encouraged to mind their own business and to avoid unnecessary involvement in the *taʿlīq* of their coreligionists.[412] The most extreme form of this type of meddling is when a man shares esoteric wisdom with another man's student. Such behavior is likened to adultery and is strictly forbidden.[413] But even a lesser involvement is frowned upon, and the partners are encouraged if possible to resolve all issues on their own. Considering the

[411] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 94.

[412] MS Arabe 1450: 160b.

[413] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 94.

strict exclusivity of the *taʿlīq* relationship, it is not surprising that before the union is officially sealed the imam takes the opportunity to advise the partners what is expected of them in their relationship. By making the *sayyid* and student promise that they will fulfill these obligations the imam is able to structure what is otherwise an extremely private relationship according to the rules considered by the Nuṣayrī community to be most conducive to the transmission of esoteric wisdom.

As described in the *K. al-Mashyakha*, the rights owed to the *sayyid* are that his student "does not defy his instruction, does not reveal his secret, does not harbor malice against him in his heart, and does not make enemies of his friends or friends of his enemies."[414] In other words, the *sayyid* is owed absolute loyalty and obedience by his student who must promise to refrain from any sentiment or action that conflicts with this requirement. The student must further agree to help his *sayyid* "in any way he can with his hand, his heart, and his tongue."[415] These obligations are listed in greater detail in (the *samāʿ* ceremony of) the *Sharḥ al-imām* where the student is advised: [416]

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[414] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215; MS Lyde 17, 158; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 257.

[415] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 215. Lyde's *K. al-Mashyakha* lists the three faculties as "eye, hand, and tongue," (see MS Lyde 17, 158, trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 257). It is likely that the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* is accurate and the three faculties with which the student is instructed to help his master should be the hand, heart, and tongue. These three often appear together in *ḥadīth*s regarding the obligation to forbid wrong behavior (*al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*) where a person is instructed to fight against evil with his hand if he is able and if not then with his tongue and then finally silently with his heart. By co-opting this series for the context of *taʿlīq*, the imam is able to equate the loyalty that the student owes to his *sayyid* with the Quranic obligation to fight evil.

[416] MS Arabe 1450, 166a. Most of these instructions are taken verbatim from a Nuṣayrī *ḥadīth* attributed to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib describing the way that believers should treat each other. See *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*, 83. The final three instructions are additions to the original list, which is why they appear outside of the conditional clause. Of course, the requirement to keep the secrets of the *sayyid* is not unique and appears in the *K. al-Mashyakha* as well. As for the order not to "dig a hole for your brother" (لا تحفر لاخيك بئراً), I am not sure if 'brother' refers to the *sayyid* or to other believers. In any event, the expression is proverbial and basically means that one should not try to trip up a brother as in the Arabic saying "he who digs a pit for his brother shall fall into it."(من حفر حفرة لأخيه وقع فيها)

> If you wish good for your master, are grateful [to him], and show him love; if you conceal his errors, have compassion for his tears, cover his nakedness, forgive his mistakes, accept his apology, visit him in his illness, restore his absence, follow his advice, ease his difficulties, are present at his death, answer his call, accept his gift, are grateful for his kindness, find his support pleasing, satisfy his needs, mediate his affairs, improve his words, convey his gift, uphold his oaths, befriend him and do not show him enmity, then your reward will increase and only your misfortunes will decrease. Do not uncover his veil, do not reveal his secret and do not dig a pit for your brother.

In the *K. al-Ḥāwī*, al-Ṭabarānī mentions other more concrete ways in which the student must defer to his *sayyid* such as consulting him before marrying, traveling, borrowing money, or opening a business.[417] All of these instructions seek to guide the student's complete submission to his master.

But *taʿlīq* is not a one-sided relationship. In fact, the student's sole objective in accepting this submissive role is to gain access to the secret religious knowledge of which his *sayyid* is a custodian. By entering into *taʿlīq* the acquision of this knowledge becomes the student's inalienable right. As the imam explains in the *K. al-Mashyakha*, "the right due to the student from his *sayyid* is that he educate him in what will bring him close to God, that he take him on the straight path,[418] that he not trouble him excessively, and not have him memorize errors."[419] By accepting the *taʿlīq* the *sayyid* promises that he will teach his student the secret religious knowledge that will enable him to advance in the religious hierarchy. He pledges that he will not take advantage of his student's voluntary servitude by imposing excessive demands. He also agrees that he will not purposefully conceal religious knowledge from his student either through

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[417] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 76.

[418] This appears as *al-ṭarīq al-mustaqīm* here.

[419] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:*, 215-16. The student's rights in the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha* are essentially the same and appear as, "good upbringing and proper instruction; and that he does not impose hardships on him, nor teach him in a faulty way; and that he shall communicate to him what trustworthy persons have communicated, and warn him against all transgressions and lusts." See MS Lyde 17, 158; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 257.

omission or dissimulation once his student has proven himself ready to receive the truth.[420] The official marker of absolute readiness is when the student graduates to *samāʿ*, the final stage of initiation after which he cannot be denied access to any religious secrets. But even during *taʿlīq* the *sayyid* must promise that he will not wrongfully withhold knowledge from his student, whether to coerce him into accepting an unfair request or simply out of spite.

By listing the rights that the student and *sayyid* owe to each other, the imam presents *taʿlīq* as a mutually obligating relationship in which both partners can expect to receive certain privileges in exchange for others. However, it is important to remember that *taʿlīq* is an essentially hierarchical relationship and that the student is not in practice granted any recourse if his *sayyid* neglects his responsibilities. He cannot divorce his *sayyid*, nor can he complain about him at a communal meeting and expect to be backed by the congregation. The imam specifies this rule at the *taʿlīq* ceremony when after listing the mutual rights of the partners he clarifies that "the words of the *sayyid* against his student are accepted but the student's word against his *sayyid* is not accepted."[421] By informing the student of this rule before the *taʿlīq* is contracted, the imam ensures that the student is aware of the asymmetrical nature of the relationship he is about to enter and that he agrees to cede all power to his *sayyid*. Only once the student has internalized this inequality by relinquishing his right to equitable treatment is his submission complete so that he is considered to be sufficiently open to religious instruction. Another reason for mentioning this rule during the *taʿlīq* ceremony is to encourage the student to try to resolve any future disagreement with his *sayyid* internally, as he would not receive external support were he to bring his complaints about his *sayyid* before the community.

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[420] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 56.

[421] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 216; MS Lyde 17, 159; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 257.

If the two agree to all of the above-mentioned terms, the imam finally officiates the *ʿaqd* between them, calling upon God and the congregation to act as witnesses. According to the account of the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* the imam says:[422]

> God, I call you to witness and I call your angels and books and apostles and those present of your creations to witness against these two for what they have undertaken to uphold of your ritual obligations and *sunna*. I have taken your oath from them regarding this and I have contracted your bond between them, the bond of *ʿa-m-s*, the weapon of the pious (*ʿuddat al-muttaqīn)*. And you, my master, are the one who bestows grace on the believers and sends down vengeance upon the unbelievers.

When pronouncing the union the imam explicitly refers to the contract as *ʿaqd ʿa-m-s*, the bond of *ʿayn-mīm-sīn*. The association of the *kalima al-ʿalīya* with the contract of *taʿlīq* is early and already appears in the *K. al-Ḥawī* where al-Ṭabarānī explains that the *taʿlīq* ceremony unites the *sayyid* and student in *ʿa-m-s*.[423]

However, as previously alluded to, the term *ʿaqd ʿa-m-s* does not appear in the account of the *Sharḥ al-imām*, which is generally marked by its reticence with regards to disclosing religious secrets to the uninitiated. By uniting the initials of ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and Salmān al-Fārisī, the *kalima al-ʿalīya* encompasses the most esoteric of Nuṣayrī beliefs in the unity and divinity of these three persons. It is therefore possible that the author of the *Sharḥ al-imām* considered the word too esoteric to be included. It seems likely that it was withheld for the purpose of hiding the secret both from the student, at this early stage of his initiation, and from any potential uninitiated readers of the text. For even in the *Sharḥ al-imām*'s account of the *samāʿ* ceremony in which directions are given for the *kalima al-ʿalīya* to be shared with the

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[422] *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 216; Similar but shorter pronouncement in MS Lyde 17, 159-60; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 257.

[423] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 54.

student, these instructions are not given explicitly. Instead the imam is directed to recite the *fatḥ* chapter of the Nuṣayrī *Dustūr*, in which the word *ʿa-m-s* appears.[424] This type of caution might be a fulfillment of the oath that the student swears at the conclusion of the *samāʿ* ceremony against "writing [the secret] by hand on the sheet of a book." [425]

In the excerpt from the *K. al-Mashyakha* included above, the expression *ʿuddat al-muttaqīn*, meaning the equipment or weapon of the pious, follows the name of the contract. This peculiar expression refers to the word *ʿa-m-s* in general, and not particularly to the *taʿlīq*. This is clarified in the *K. Taʿlīm Diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya*, the Nuṣayrī catechism based on the *K. al-Mashyakha*, in which the word *ʿa-m-s* is similarly called *ʿuddat al-muʾminīn*. Question seventy-four asks, "what is the equiptment (*ʿudda*) of our brethren the believers? ...[It] is at all times *ʿayn, mīm, sīn,* which are the *ʿayn* of ʿAlī, the *mīm* of Muḥammad, and the *sīn* of Salsal (Salmān)."[426] The word *ʿa-m-s* is a weapon or tool because it is believed to protect the pious when it is invoked. This idea is similar to the *ḥadīth* transmitted by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib that states, "supplication is the weapon of the believer" (*al-duʿāʾ silāḥ al-muʾmin*).[427] It is likely that the expression *a-m-s ʿuddat al-muttaqīn* is the *bāṭinī* Nuṣayrī adaptation of this sentiment.

Even though *ʿa-m-s* is described as a weapon that can protect believers, the imam is careful to clarify that the word is not magic but is rather an invocation to God for his aid in difficult situations. This is why the imam immediately follows the expression by clarifying, "and you my Lord are the one who bestows grace upon the believers and sends down vengeance upon

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[424] MS Arabe 1450, 166b.

[425] Ibid., 165a.

[426] See Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*, 216.

[427] *Mustadrak al-Wasāʾil* 5, 121, 12.

the unbelievers." In other words, it is God who aids the believers or punishes the unbelievers when the word is invoked.

The imam concludes the contract by reciting Quranic verses referring to the gestures of the two partners. With reference to their joint hands the imam first reads Q48: 10, "Behold, all who pledge their allegiance to you pledge their allegiance to God: the hand of God is over their hands. Hence he who breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own hurt; whereas he who remains true to what he has pledged unto God, on him will He bestow a reward supreme."[428] The imam then removes the handkerchief that had been covering their hands and recites Q50: 22, "but now We have lifted from thee thy veil, and sharp is thy sight today!" With this, the student has officially walked into the light and can formally begin his education.

Drinking the ʿAbd al-Nūr

In the final element of the *taʿlīq* ceremony, the student physically enacts his reception of the initiatory knowledge of his master by drinking the remnant of his cup of *ʿabd al-nūr*. As explained earlier under the description of the *sharb al-sār* ceremony, the remnant of the cup of *ʿabd al-nūr* of a believer is called his *sār*, perhaps a conflation of the words for mystery (*sirr*) and remnant (*suʾr*). By ingesting the remnants of the *ʿabd al-nūr* of his master the student is believed to receive his mystery and blessing. As al-Ṭabarānī writes in the *K. al-Ḥāwī*, "the *sār* is the remnant (*suʾr*) and the remnant of the believer is a cure."[429]

The idea that some kind of mystical power or *baraka* can be transmitted through the leftovers of a believer's drink is not unique to the Nuṣayrīs. As Yaron Friedman points out in his

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[428] In the *Sharḥ al-imām* this verse is recited during the *samāʿ* ceremony. See MS Arabe 1450, 163a.

[429] See al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 75.

analysis of the ritual, this idea appears in mainstream Shiite traditions as well.[430] In fact, the latter half of al-Ṭabarānī's equation, which in Arabic appears as *suʾr al-muʾmin shifāʾ*, is reported to have been one of the famous *hadīth al-ʿarbaʿumiʾa* that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib taught to his companions.[431] Of course, in mainstream Shiite thought the *suʾr* whose virtues ʿAlī extols could hardly have referred to wine, which is in all contexts forbidden. However the idea that religious mystery can be passed from one believer to the next through the sharing of a cup is one that was held by the mainstream Shiite community and must have been adapted for the wine drinking ritual at the core of the Nuṣayrī initiation ceremony.

A related belief that may have informed the practice of *sharb al-sār* is that esoteric knowledge can be transmitted through saliva. This practice is called *taḥnīk* and can be found in numerous Shiite *ḥadīth* describing the transmission of the *ʿilm al-bāṭin* from Muḥammad to ʿAlī and then from one Imam to the next. According to one *ḥadīth* ʿAlī began his sermon upon accession to the caliphate by demanding, "O People! Question me before you lose me! This is the basket of knowledge! This is the saliva of the prophet, which he had me drink drop by drop! Ask me for I have knowledge of the beginning and of the end!"[432] By displaying the saliva of the prophet, ʿAlī meant to provide evidence of his mastery over the mystical knowledge that was his *waṣiyya* from the prophet. In the *Divine Guide* Amir Moezzi has collected quite a few such traditions, which feature the transmission of knowledge from one Imam to the next either by

[430] Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 213.

[431] See Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* ed. Muḥammad al-Rāzī, (Ṭihrān: al-Maktaba al-Islāmīyah, 1388/1966), XVII: 208-9, where several related *ḥadīth* on this subject are recorded. Aside from the one repeated by al-Ṭabarānī these include "in the remnant of the believer is a cure for seventy illnesses" and "whoever drinks the remnant of the believer [causes] the two of them to be blessed. God creates an angel between them who makes amends for them until the hour arises".

[432] See, for example the Ibn Bābawayh *Amalī* "majlis" 55-341-1

spitting into the mouth or by suckling the tongue.[433] In all of these traditions saliva is the medium that initiates the student into the secrets of his master. This same principle underlies the Nuṣayrī custom of *sharb al-sār* that concludes the *taʿlīq* ceremony. By drinking the remnants of his master's cup the student not only ingests *ʿabd al-nūr*, a substance that has its own esoteric significance, but he also takes in the initiatory knowledge transferred through the saliva of his master.

The instructions for this part of the ceremony differ considerably in the *Sharḥ al-imām* and the two *K. al-Mashyakha.* In the *K. al-Bākūra*, the description of the wine drinking ritual is not very detailed but appears to have conformed more closely to the account found in the two *K. al-Mashyakha.* According to the *Sharḥ al-imām*, after the student and *sayyid* have been joined the *sayyid* commences his role as educator by instructing his student to "drink the *sirr al-Imām,*" the mystery of the Imam (ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib), which is another name for the *ʿabd al-nūr* ceremony.[434]

What is unique about the *Sharḥ al-imām*'s version of the ritual is that the student is not only given to drink the *sār* of his own *sayyid*, he must also ingest the *ʿabd al-nūr* of the imam and the entire congregation. This practice is quite strange and does not appear in any of the other accounts of initiation. Considering the exclusivity of the *taʿlīq* relationship as well as the esoteric significance of drinking the *sār* of another man one would think that this behavior would be particularly taboo. Nevertheless according to the *Sharḥ al-imām*, the student is commanded to retreat to the back of the room where he drinks the *sār* of the imam, his *sayyid*, and the congregation saying, "to your *sār*, may God make your return great. To the *sār* of your religion

[433] Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*: 75-7; Idem, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*: 36-9.

[434] See MS Lyde 17: 132-48; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 251-3.

and the *sār* of your faith, I am your servant and under your obedience." He then kisses the hands and feet of the imam and of the entire congregation. These actions suggest that the purpose of the ritual is for the student to announce his submission to all of the believers. But it is a perplexing practice and is not one that is repeated in any of the other accounts.

After the student has finished his drink the congregation reciprocates by drinking to the mystery of his admission to his *sayyid* (*sirr al-qabūl*) and wishing him luck in his endeavor. The congregation then returns to their original positions and perfume and incense are brought out, ingredients over which certain prayers are recited.[435] Finally the *naqīb* writes the date and month of the ceremony so that the correct amount of time till the *samāʿ* ceremony can be observed.[436] The congregation then disperses and the student begins his nine-month gestation period in which he studies under the tutelage of his master.

The *STA K. al-Mashyakha*'s description of the ritual of drinking *ʿabd al-nūr* is very different in that it revolves around the mystery of *ʿa-m-s* that is celebrated during *taʿlīq*. It begins with the imam putting a drop of wine on the thumb of the *sayyid* and commanding the student to kiss his *sayyid's* hand on "the mark of the remnant" (*ʿalā atharin min al-sūʾr*). This is the *K. al-Mashyakha*'s version of *sharb al-sār* and symbolizes the student's reception of esoteric knowledge from the hands of his master.

The two then stand before the congregation and the *sayyid* requests that the community release him from the oath of secrecy he took at his own initiation so that he can pass the knowledge on to the next generation. He says, "my brothers and *sayyid*s, I have stood before *sayyid*s such as yourselves and they took an oath from me that I would not reveal the secret of

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[435] For the contents of these prayers, called *quddās al-ṭīb* and *quddās al-bakhūr*, see Joseph Catafago, "Die drei Messen der Nossairier," *ZDMG* 2 (1848), 388-94.

[436] Instructions for writing down the date and month of the ceremony are given in al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 60.

God, may He be exalted, except to one of my brothers who have declared themselves to me and I have declared myself to him, but will you allow me to open up to this student?"

By making this request the *sayyid* acknowledges the paradox of initiation. In order to ensure the survival of the religion the tight ring of secrecy meant to protect it must be breached. This is an extremely precarious moment for the community whose spiritual and physical existence depends on their ability to remain invisible. Initiating a person who is often young and in any event has had no prior opportunity to prove his receptivity towards Nuṣayrī beliefs threatens both the integrity of the secret and the safety of the community. This is why the *sayyid* petitions the congregation to release him from his oath. He knows that if his endeavor were to fail the entire community would be at risk. It is therefore important for him to receive their absolution as well as their approval of his candidate before he proceeds.

To this request the congregation responds by reciting Q4: 6: "if you find them to be mature of mind, hand over to them their possessions." [437] In the Quran, this verse refers to the obligation of giving orphans back the property held in trust for them by their guardians once they reach maturity. By taking this verse to refer to initiation the congregation is able to calm the fears of the *sayyid* and suggest that religious knowledge is something that already belongs to the student but has merely been withheld from him until he was ready to seek it out. As God commands believers to return the financial trust to the orphans in their care, so he instructs believers to hand over the religious trust to their students, who are likened to spiritual orphans. This *taʾwīl* sanctions the *sayyid*'s breach of his oath while at the same time absolving him of the responsibility for exposing the community to the dangers of initiation.

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[437] This is the same verse as one adduced by Ṭabarānī in the *K. al-Ḥāwī* for having a large number of witnesses present at the *taʿlīq* ceremony. See discussion Chapter Two.

The Prayer of Dissociation (al-Barāʾa)

Having received the blessing of the community, the *sayyid* proceeds to teach his student the prayer of Dissociation (*al-barāʾa*), which according to the *K. al-Bākūra* was also the first prayer Sulaymān al-Adhanī learned upon his initiation.[438] The *barāʾa* is an appropriate first step in the student's education, for with it he articulates his severance from his past life and from all of the false beliefs to which that life was subject. The prayer includes a long list of names of the enemies of the faith whom believers must denounce in order to attain salvation. Dissociating from these men and the evil they represent is a prerequisite of *walāya*, the obligation to associate with ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. A full version of this prayer is recorded in the *K. al-Bākūra* under the title *al-tabriʾa*, meaning the disburdening.[439] A nearly identical version can be found in MS Taymūr 564, with some minor additions, which I include in brackets.[440] The prayer is largely comprised of the following *ḥadīth* attributed to Ibn Nuṣayr and what was ostensibly added to it over the years:

> The tradition is narrated of Abū Shuʿayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-ʿAbdī al-Bakrī al-Numayrī, who said: Whosoever wants salvation from the heat of fires should say: God, curse a company of men who have established evil and tyranny, who are the nine groups of corruptors who act in a depraved fashion and do not make amends in religion; whose path is towards hell and to it they leap. The foremost of them is Abū Bakr, the cursed, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the sinful adversary, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, the stoned Satan, Ṭalḥah,[441] Saʿd,[442] Saʿīd,[443] Khālid ibn al-Walīd, the handler of the iron lance,[444] Muʿāwiya and his son Yazīd,[445] al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf

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[438] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 7; Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 234.

[439] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 43-45; trans. in Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 272-4.

[440] MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564: 28-30.

[441] Talḥa b. Ubayd Allāh. He contested ʿAlī's leadership and broke his oath of allegiance to him.

[442] Saʿd b. Abī Waqqās who refused to swear allegiance to ʿAlī upon his accession to the caliphate.

[443] Another companion of the Prophet, Saʿīd ibn Zayd.

[444] Khālid ibn al-Walīd is purported to have beaten ʿAlī with an iron lance in order to force him to swear allegiance to Abū Bakr.

al-Thaqafī the tormentor,[446] ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān the stupid,[447] and Hārūn al-Rashīd.[448] May the curse remain upon them perpetually until the Promised Day; the Day when Hell will be asked, 'Have you had enough?' to which it will reply, 'is there any more?'(Q5: 30). Then you O ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib will do what you wish and pass judgment, as you will. I ask you that you let your indignation and wrath descend upon Isḥāq al-Aḥmar the lame[449] and Ismāʿīl b. Khallād the ignorant.[450] Curse the Shaykh Aḥmad al-Badawī,[451] the Shaykh Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī,[452] the Shaykh Ibrahīm al-Dasūqī,[453] the Shaykh Muḥammad al-Maghribī,[454] al-Shibl the Pearl,[455] the Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Gīlānī,[456] and every Jew and Christian. Curse the Ḥanafite, Shāfiʿite, Mālikite, and Ḥanbalite schools [*and the Nestorians, Jacobites, Sadducees, and Pharisees*]. O Prince of Bees,[457] O ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, May your indignation and your wrath fall upon al-Juland b. Karkar,[458]

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[445] Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the first Ummayad caliph (r. 661-80 AD) who faught against and usurped ʿAlī, and his son and successor Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya (r. 680-3 AD) who killed the third Shiite Imam al-Ḥusayn at the Battle of Karbala.

[446] Umayyad military governor of Iraq who persecuted Shiites. He is particularly notorious for killing Rushayd al-Hajarī, the third *bāb* of the Nuṣayrī religion. He died in 95/714 AD.

[447] The fifth Umayyad Caliph (r. 685-705 AD). He is responsible for appointing al-Hajjāj and many other anti-Shiite policies.

[448] The fifth ʿAbbasid Caliph (r. 786-809 AD).

[449] The eponymn of the rival Isḥāqī sect. See discussion below.

[450] A famous Isḥāqī rival of al-Ṭabarānī. See discussion below.

[451] Founder of the Sufi Badawī order. Born in Fez (596-675 AH) and studied under Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī in Baghdad. He eventually established his own Sufi order in Egypt. See J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 45.

[452] Founder of the Sufi Rifāʿiyya order in Iraq (d. 577/1182). See ibid., 37-40.

[453] Egyptian Sufi (d. 687/1288). Also of Rifāʿī lineage. See ibid., 45-6.

[454] I think this must be Ibn Arabī (d. 638/1240).

[455] Shaykh Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), another famous Sufi of Baghdad. See Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mystecism: a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 64-6. His title comes from a famous interaction he had with his master, al-Junayd, in which he asked him to sell or give him the pearls of spiritual awakening. Al-Junayd replied that if he sold the pearl to him, he would not be able to afford it and if he gave it to him he would not appreciate its worth. Instead he ought to dive headfirst into the sea and obtain his own pearls.

[456] Founder of the Qādiriyya order in Baghdad (d. 561/1166). On the life of ʿAbd al-Qādir and the Qādiriyya see Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*: 40-4; Knysh, *Islamic Mystecism*: 179-91.

[457] This is common title for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in Nuṣayrī sources. Believers are likened to bees who collect honey i.e. gnosis and who demonstrate absolute loyalty to their queen. See discussion of this title in Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 125-6.

[458] See discussion below.

> Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, the she-camel hitter Qaydār,[459] Ḥubayyib the perfume seller,[460] [*and Joseph the Carpenter*,] and cause them to enter Hell-fire. "What will explain to you what Hell-fire is? It does not permit one to endure nor does it leave one to die. It changes the color of men upon whom (is the curse) of nineteen" (Q74: 27-30). Curse also those who play with apes and who take hold of black snakes,[461] and every Christian and Jew, and whoever believes that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib ate or drank or was born or had sexual intercourse. May God curse them! May God curse them! And may you cause the curse to rest upon the cursed Yuḥannā Mārūn the Patriarch,[462] [*Samson the Mad, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*] and upon anyone who eats your bounties but worships other than you. Dissociate us from them completely as flesh is separated from the bone by the mercy of ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and Salmān and by the grace of *ʿa-m-s*.

In this passage is embedded an entire history of Nuṣayrī polemics. The prayer, most likely compiled piecemeal over the years in response to new threats, includes a hodgepodge of characters, both historical and mythical, that believers must condemn to hell. The earlier names, including those of the *rāshidūn* caliphs, some of the *ṣaḥāba*, and the famous Umayyad and Abbasid enemies of the Shiite community, are recognizable from their oppositional role in the central Shiite drama and are reviled by all followers of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, not merely the Nuṣayriyya. But the names that follow refer to particular opponents of the Nuṣayrīs ranging from their early history in Iraq to their later years in Syria. Most prominent among them is Isḥaq al-Aḥmar, the founder of the Isḥāqiyya sect, who as a contemporary of Ibn Nuṣayr in Kufa was a rival claimant to the *bābiyya* of the Imam al-Ḥasan al-Askarī. The Nuṣayriyya and Isḥaqiyya

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[459] See discussion below.

[460] Ḥubayyib al-ʿAṭṭār (the vocalization appears in the text). I have not been able to identify this name. There is a fifth century Ḥabīb al-ʿAṭṭār against whom the Syriac Bishop Mar Philoxenus of Mabug (d.523) is said to have written a polemical treatise, but I have not been able to discover additional information about this man, nor why he might appear in the Nuṣayrī *barāʾa* prayer. (See Aphram I. Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syrian Literature and Sciences*, trans. Matti Moosa (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press), 265.

[461] I am unsure of the origin of this prohibition against grasping black snakes. However, it seems to have been a widespread superstition in Syria. See the travelogue of the 19th century Syrian Christian, Habeeb Risk Allah Effendi, *The Thistle and the Cedar of Lebanon* (London: Wertheimer, 1853), 220. See also Phillip Khuri Hitti, *History of Syria: including Lebanon and Palestine* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 123, where this same superstition is attributed to a survival of pagan snake worship.

[462] John Maron (d. 707 AD), the first Maronite Patriarch. See discussion below.

sects that emerged from this struggle were sufficiently similar in theological terms to have been a major threat to each other. Their competition was well known enough to be recorded in the heresiographical compilation of al-Shahrastanī.[463] Ismāʿīl b. Khallād who appears in this passage in connection with Isḥāq al-Aḥmar was the main Isḥāqī opponent of al-Ṭabarānī in Latakiya and is well known from other Nuṣayrī texts in which he is cursed.

While the rivalries alluded to by the above-mentioned figures are well documented, there are other names included in the prayer that hint at an active polemical history that has yet to be deciphered. For example, the long list of shaykhs cursed in the prayer are all founders and saints of prominent sufi *ṭarīqa*s from the 5th/11th to 7th/13th centuries, particularly the Badawiyya, Rifāʿiyya, and Qādiriyya orders. The particular quarrel between these groups and the Nuṣayrī community has yet to be explored. Since both the Nuṣayrīs and the Sufis billed themselves as initiatory brotherhoods in possession of esoteric wisdom, it is not surprising that competition should have developed between them. However the specifics of their interactions deserve to be studied.[464] Furthermore, while all Jews, Christians, and Sunni Muslims are condemned in the prayer, special invective is reserved for John Maron, the first Maronite Patriarch of Antioch. His singling out is likely to reflect a particular rivalry between the Nuṣayrīs and Maronite Christians in the mountains of Syria.[465]

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[463] Kazi and Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*: 163.

[464] Paul Nwyia has already noted the presence of Sufi terminology in the *diwān* of the 13th century Nuṣayrī poet al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī. However, aside from proposing a parallel development between Sufism and Nuṣayrism that might account for the common language, no specifics of Nuṣayrī-Sufi interactions are described. See Paul Nwyia, "Makzūn al-Sinjārī: poète mystique alaouite," *Studia Islamica* 40(1974): 96-110.

[465] As mentioned above, the MS Taymūr 564 version of this prayer also curses the Nestorians, Jacobites, Sadducees and Pharisees. The Nuṣayrī community might very well have come in contact with the Nestorians and Jacobites, less likely the Sadducees and Pharisees, who were probably just added for completeness, as they are known to have been Jewish sects. Moreover, the mention of Sadducees and Pharisees suggests a Christian source, as these are *the* Jewish sects of the Gospels. I would like to credit Michael Cook for this latter insight.

Conspicuously absent from either list of adversaries is any mention of the Druze. The rivalry between the Nuṣayrīs and Druze is known to have existed from the earliest years of the sects and is evidenced by the anti-Nuṣayrī tract included in the eleventh century *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma* of the Druze.[466] Since the two sects lived in close contact in Syria and held beliefs that were quite similar in many respects, it is surprising that the Druze were excluded from the *barāʾa* prayer. Their absence supports Yaron Friedman's hypothesis that the Druze felt more threatened by Nuṣayrīs in the medieval period than did the Nuṣayrīs of the Druze.[467]

Most perplexing is the inclusion of the names of mythical and semi-mythical adversaries known from the *tafsīr* of certain Quranic stories. For example, al-Juland b. Karkar is the name given to the anonymous evil king whose plan to seize the poor men's boat was foiled by al-Khiḍr's intervention in Q18: 79.[468] Likewise Qaydār is the name given to the member of the tribe of Thamūd who showed his epic ingratitude to God by striking the she-camel that the prophet Ṣāliḥ made miraculously appear in Q7: 73-78.[469] Since these men were thought to live centuries before the rise of Islam their inclusion is difficult to explain.

In fact these are codenames for more contemporary adversaries. Nuṣayrīs believe in a cyclical history in which prominent good and evil figures repeatedly reincarnate in every age. Therefore, when cursing these pre-Islamic villains the Nuṣayrīs are in fact damning their more contemporary manifestations. Confirmation of this theory in the case of al-Juland b. Karkar can

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[466] See "A Druze-Nuṣayrī debate in the 'Epistles of Wisdom'" in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 153-61.

[467] Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 43-4.

[468] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*: 155.

[469] Al-Adhanī mentions in several instances that Nuṣayrīs believe the she-camel of Ṣāliḥ to be one of the animal forms that ʿAlī ibn b. Ṭālib took on earth. This identification makes Qaydār's crime of hitting the she-camel even more terrible, (see al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 17, 93).

be found in the *K. al-dalāʾil fī al-masāʾil* where al-Ṭabarānī gives the *bāṭinī* interpretation of the story of al-Khiḍr and the boat found in Q18: 79.[470] Al-Ṭabarānī explains, "the unjust king who would seize boats is al-Juland b. Karkar, the ruler of the city of Latakia, and in the time of the apostle of God he was the Second (*al-thānī* i.e. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb),[471] the cursed, may God despise him, and he continues to abhor the knowledge of God, and to avert people from it, to prevent people from hearing it and to punish people for it in every era and cycle."[472] According to this explanation, al-Juland b. Karkar is the archetypal opponent who in the time of the prophet returned as ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and who continues to reappear throughout history as the enemy of the believers.

It is significant that al-Ṭabarānī calls al-Juland b. Karkar the ruler of Latakia. Traditionally he is described as the ruler of Oman.[473] This association reinforces his identification with the contemporary foes of the Nuṣayrī community in Latakia. It is likely that in this instance al-Juland b. Karkar is really the same Isḥāqī leader Ismāʿīl b. Khallād who was cursed earlier in the prayer. Ismāʿīl b. Khallād, who was derogatively called Abū Duhayba

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[470] "As for that boat, it belonged to some needy people who toiled upon the sea -and I desired to damage it because [I knew that] behind them was a king who is would seize every boat by brute force"

[471] See the discussion of derogatory nicknames earlier in this chapter.

[472] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*: 155.

[473] In fact, al-Juland (or al-Julandā) ibn Karkar was an actual historical figure; he was the eponym of the Julandā, an Omani dynasty (of the Arab tribe Azd) that, as clients of the Sasanians, ruled the Persian coast of the Gulf since pre-Islamic times. It is said that two Julandā brothers, ʿAbd and Jayfar, were rulers of Oman at the time of the prophet and that upon receiving a letter from him, they voluntarily converted to Islam together with their subjects. Even under Islam, the Julandā continued to rule Oman more or less independently, officially breaking away from the caliphate in 132/749 when al-Julandā ibn Masʿūd, of this same Julandā family, became the first Ibāḍī Imam of Oman. When Abbasid troops killed him two years later they appointed other Julandās who were loyal to the Abbasid Caliphate to govern the country. Julandā rule was finally overthrown at the Battle of Majaza in 177/793 when Ibāḍīs ejected the Abbasid Julandās from Oman and restored the Ibāḍī Imamate under Muḥammad b. Abī ʿAffan of the rival Yaḥmadī clan (of Azd). For an analysis of this history see, Isam al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2000). Also see John Craven Wilkinson, "The Julanda of Oman," *Journal of Oman Studies* 1(1975). It is unlikely that the Nuṣayrīs had any personal conflict with the Julandās who were long gone by the time the *barāʾa* was composed; their identification of al-Juland b. Karkar with the Opponent is likely taken from the *tafsīr* on Q18: 79 and not from personal interactions.

(father of gold) by the Nuṣayrīs because of his excessive wealth, is known to have ruled Latakia in the time of al-Ṭabarānī and to have made life difficult for the Nuṣayrīs living there.[474] Moreover, al-Juland's name appears in this prayer together with Isḥaq al-Aḥmar ("May your indignation and your wrath fall upon al-Juland b. Karkar and Ishaq al-Aḥmar"), suggesting that the two are related. The other mythical and semi-mythical names probably also stand for contemporary Nuṣayrī opponents, but this remains to be confirmed.

Finally, the prayer polemicizes against the advocates and practitioners of certain heretical beliefs and practices. Notable among these are those who believe that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib "ate or drank or was born or had sexual intercourse." This idea, namely that the historical ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had a body of flesh and blood, was one of the most rigorously combated heresies plaguing the Nuṣayrī community. It was refuted in great detail in al-Khaṣībī's *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*,[475] al-Ṭabarānī's *K. al-Dalāʾil fī al-Masāʾil*,[476] and was even the subject of a Nuṣayrī religious disputation that took place in the late seventh/thirteenth century.[477] The Nuṣayrī community responsible for the composition of the *barāʾa* prayer insisted on a strict docetic ideal, denying the material reality of all human aspects of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and claiming that everything he did in his historic manifestation was simply an illusion meant to mislead the unbelievers. As al-Jillī is reported to have taught, when ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib manifested on earth he appeared to each man according to his individual spiritual state. "The people of purity [saw him] clearly, the people of

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[474] al-Ṭawīl, *Tārīkh al-ʿAlawīyīn*: 263-4.

[475] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 30.

[476] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalāʾil*: 127-32.

[477] The arguments advanced during the debate were recorded in the descriptively titled *Munāẓarat al-Shaykh al-Nashshābī tataḍammanu akhaṣṣa ʿaqāʾidihim bi-l-tawḥīd* (Debate of the Shaykh al-Nashshābī including those of their doctrines relating more directly to the unity of God) studied by Bar Asher and Kofsky. See "Nuṣayrī Trinitarian Theology according to a 7th/13th century treatise" in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 14-28.

mixed character [saw him] clearly [sic], and the people of turbidity [saw him] opaquely."[478] By this cryptic declaration al-Jillī meant that on the one hand there were the true believers who recognized ʿAlī as the eternal *maʿnā* and were not mislead by his seeming physicality, while on the other hand there were the unbelievers who "thought that he was one of them and flesh like them," and that in between these two poles was an "intermediate" position. This category was comprised of people of mixed character who merited a certain clarity but whose flaws kept them from perfect understanding. In other words, these people were able to recognize ʿAlī's divine state but erred in assuming that he also had a physical aspect. They thought they saw ʿAlī clearly but were mistaken.[479]

Through recitation of the *barāʾa* prayer, the student aligns himself with al-Jillī's first category. He declares himself to be a true believer by dissociating not only from the enemies of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the unbelievers of all shades, but also from the people of wrong beliefs in his own community. This is why recitation of the *barāʾa* is a precondition of initiation: it allows the student to articulate his detachment from any disbelieving or heretical associations, be they the obvious enemies of the faith or even those whose doctrines do not seem to be so different.

Only after the student has dissociated from all of these adversaries can he partake in the drinking of the *ʿabd al-nūr*, which is the culmination of his *taʿlīq* ceremony. As mentioned above, this ritual is intimately tied to the *kalima al-ʿalīya*, and in fact as the student is given the *ʿabd al-nūr* to drink the congregation recites the letters of the sacred word to him.[480] They do this

[478] al-Ṭabarānī, *R. al-Dhuhūr wa-al-buṭūn*: 16.

[479] Ibid., 17.

[480] The sacred word is called the *samāʿ* in this instance: "he reveals to him the letters of the *samāʿ*... *ʿa-m-s*." I imagine that this is because hearing this word is what allows the student to progress to the final stage of initiation. As Michael Cook has pointed out to me, it is presumably not an accident that the consonants of the word *samāʿ* are identical with those of *a-m-s*, in reverse order.

"letter by letter giving him to drink a mouthful for every letter until the three letters are complete, [saying] 'the mystery of the pact of *ʿayn*, the mystery of the pact of *ʿayn-mīm*, the mystery of the pact of *ʿayn-mīm-sīn.*'"[481]

This way of drinking the *ʿabd al-nūr* is probably based on the practice of al-Khaṣībī, the founder of the sect, about whom it is reported, "When *ʿabd al-nūr* was brought to him, he used to hold the chalice in his right hand and drink from it in three gulps."[482] Undoubtedly, this practice was meant to affirm the Nuṣayrī trinity hypostatized in the drink. Adding a letter of the *kalimah al-ʿāliya* with each gulp was probably meant to emphasize the hierarchy within the unity of this trinity.[483]

After drinking the *ʿabd al-nūr* the student kisses the hands of the imam and those present, and the *naqīb* distributes the disbursement (*nafaqa*), perhaps the feast that the student has prepared for his ceremony.[484] The *naqīb* then recites the *fātiḥa* of the *sayyid* Abū ʿAbd Allāh (al-

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[481] *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 216. Sulaymān al-Adhanī's account of this ritual is as follows: "the *sayyid* stood beside me and in his hand was a cup of wine. He gave me to drink the wine and instructed me to say 'the mystery of *ʿa-m-s*. The *ʿayn* is ʿAlī whom they call the *maʿnā*, the *mīm* is Muḥammad whom they call the *ism* and *ḥijāb*, and the *sīn* is Salmān al-Fārisī whom they call the *bāb.* Then after this the imam told me that it is an obligation upon you to recite this expression, namely, *sirr ʿa-m-s*, every day five hundred times." (al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 3.) Al-Adhanī's account is not nearly as detailed as those of the *Sharḥ al-imām* or *K. al-Mashyakha* but its emphasis on the recitation of *sirr ʿa-m-s*, particularly during the drinking of the *ʿabd al-nūr*, is what leads me to suppose that it was more similar to the account of the *K. al-Mashyakha*.

[482] See MS Lyde 17: 133-6; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 249-50. According to this report al-Khaṣībī would recite a prayer upon drinking the *ʿabd al-nūr*, the main portion of which reads: "O God, this is your servant, *ʿabd al-nūr*, a substance you have graced, extolled, and absolutely permitted to your devotees who know you, and explicitly proscribed to your enemies who deny you. O God, our master, as you have permitted it to us, bless us by it with security and protection and health against sickness, and remove from us worry and sorrow."

[483] When providing instructions for drinking *ʿabd al-nūr* (not specific to initiation), the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha* also has the congregation drink it in three sips. However, instead of dedicating these sips to the three letters of the *kalima al-ʿāliya,* these sips celebrate the *sirr al-Imām*, *sirr ahl al-bayt*, and *sirr al-nuqabāʾ wa-l-nujabāʾ* respectively. Relevant prayers and postures accompany each one of these. See MS Lyde 17: 142-55; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 251-6.

[484] I think this must be the feast that the student has prepared for his ceremony but I am not certain. The reason I believe that *nafaqa* refers to the feast is because in the imam's sermon of the *Sharḥ al-imām* the student is promised that his *nafaqa* will be returned to him if he decides not to go through with the *taʿlīq* (see discussion earlier in this chapter). So now that the ceremony has concluded it makes sense that the *nafaqa* should be distributed. Alternatively, could the *nafaqa* be the enigmatic *qurbān* mentioned in q.77 of the *K. taʿlīm diyānat an-nuṣayriyya*?

Khaṣībī), which is the first chapter in the Nuṣayrī *Dustūr*, and wishes the *sayyid* and student success.

The *Samāʿ* Ceremony

The final ceremony described in the accounts of initiation is the *samāʿ* ceremony, which takes place on average nine months after *taʿlīq*. *Samāʿ* is the culmination of the three-stage process that began with *sharb al-sār* and continued with *taʿlīq*, and which marks the student's official entry into the sect. It is thus the most important ceremony in the series and, despite certain differences, is described with the greatest uniformity in the sources. The culmination of this ceremony is the oath of secrecy that the student is made to swear, and almost every element of this ceremony is designed to impress upon the student the gravity of his oath.

According to the *Sharḥ al-imām*, the ceremony must take place at dawn. This timing ensures that the ritual occurs in private and also symbolizes the student's entrance into the light of religious knowledge. The *naqīb* wakes the sleeping congregants and invites them to a predetermined location.[485] This will usually be the house of the *sayyid* unless he doesn't have enough room in which case it will be at the *naqīb*'s house or at some other house that can accommodate the crowd.[486] On arrival, they form a circle and the student, who waits at a

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According to the catechism the *qurbān* is the consecrated bread eaten by believers together with the *'abd al-nūr* as part of the mass ceremony. There is presently no other evidence for the inclusion of bread in the Nuṣayrī mass and modern scholarship has assumed that its inclusion in the *K. taʿlīm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya* reflects a Christian influence on that text. But perhaps the *nafaqa* handed out at the end of the *taʿlīq* ceremony is the same as the *qurbān* of the catechism?

[485] MS Arabe 1450: 162b-63a. See also al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 73.

[486] Idem, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 110.

distance, is made to pass behind his *sayyid* into the center of the circle.[487] This choreography reenacts the student's entrance into the community by way of his master. The *naqīb*, who as in the previous ceremonies acts as the stage director, presents the student to the imam, and then he and the *sayyid* flank the student, feeding him his lines. The *naqīb* places the student's hand in that of the imam and consecrates the ceremony by reciting Q48: 10, "Behold, all who pledge their allegiance to you pledge their allegiance to God: the hand of God is over their hands. Hence he who breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own hurt; whereas he who remains true to what he has pledged unto God, on him will He bestow a reward supreme."[488]

Discourse to the Disciple after the Question has been Put to Him: Acceptance of the Ṣaʿb Mustaṣʿab

The imam begins the ceremony by asking what the student desires, to which he responds, "I desire the secret to which you are party, o believers." This exchange is of great consequence and is present in some form in every account of *samāʿ*.[489] In fact, the *K. al-Mashyakha* entitles the chapter describing the *samāʿ* ceremony *Khiṭāb al-tilmīdh baʿd al-sūʾāl* (discourse to the

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[487] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 159. Lyde obtained this information from his young Nuṣayrī servant who once spied on the ceremony through the chinks of a door. But it is also partially confirmed by al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 3; *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 217, according to which the student is first made to stand at a distance from the congregation and then brought before the imam.

[488] MS Arabe 1450: 163a; MS Lyde 17: 161.

[489] MS Arabe 1450: 163a; MS Lyde 17: 161-2; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 258; al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 3-5; trans. in Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 230-1; *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 217. The most complex version of this exchange is that found in the *K. al-Bākūra* of Sulaymām al-Adhanī. Before submitting the question to the student, the imam first asks the *sayyid* what he desires. This question is repeated three times, with the *sayyid* eventually responding that he would like to initiate a student. Only after the imam warns the *sayyid* of the seriousness of his request, and is in turn assured that he is up to the challenge, does the imam turn to the student and present the question directly to him (see page references above). The exchange in the *K. al-Mashyakha* (MS Lyde 17) is also notable in that in the student's response, the term *shanabawayh* is used again (see discussion earlier in this chapter for and explanation of this term). The student announces, "my desire is that you free my neck from the yoke of slavery and properly guide me to the knowledge of God and direct me from the darkness of blindness and *shanabawayh* and grant me everlasting life."

disciple after the question has been put to him) with reference to this question.[490] As with previous measures of this sort, insisting that the student personally requests *samāʿ* ensures that he truly wishes to be initiated and places the onus for the preservation of its secrets on his shoulders.

The imam then responds with the following warning: [491]

> Our secret is a concealed secret; it is difficult (*saʿb*) and extremely arduous (*mustaṣʿab*). None can bear it but an angel that is close [to God], a prophet sent as an apostle, or a believer whose heart God has tested with knowledge and faith. For there are many angels and none of them can bear our doctrine but those who are close, and there are many prophets and none of them can bear our doctrine but those who are apostles, and there are many believers and none of them can bear our doctrine but those who are tested.

The content of this warning derives from a *ḥadīth*, most commonly attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, which is not unique to the Nuṣayrīs, but which is found in most Imāmī *ḥadīth* collections. In fact, there are entire chapters in al-Ṣaffār's *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt* and al-Kulaynī's *Kāfī* dedicated to this saying.[492] For the Nuṣayrīs, this *ḥadīth* became a locus around which to develop ideas of religious hierarchy, exclusivity, and the need for graduated and individual initiation. As al-Bāqir is made to say in the *Majmuʿ al-Akhbār*: [493]

> Our doctrine is difficult and extremely arduous, a sense that is sensed (*ḥiss maḥsūs*), none can bear it but a close angel, a prophet sent as an apostle, or a believer whose

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[490] MS Lyde 17: 161.

[491] This formulations of the *ḥadīth* can be found in ibid., 165-7; trans. in Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 260. Similar versions can be found in MS Arabe 1450: 163a; al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5; trans. in ; Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 231-2; *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 217.

[492] al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*: I: 37-44; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*: I: 401-2. Also see al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*: I: 28-9, 320-1, 339, 390. Discussions of the *ḥadīth* in the secondary literature can be found in Sami Makarem, *al-Taqiyya fī al-Islām* (London: Druze Heritage Foundation, 2004), 143-8; L. Clarke, "The Rise and Decline of *Taqiyya* in Twelver Shiʿism," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Taurus and Institute for Ismaili Studies, 2005); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Only the Man of God is Human: Theology and Mystical Anthropology According to Early Imami Exegesis," in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London: I. B. Taurus and Institute for Ismaili Studies, 2011), 293-6.

[493] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 27-8.

> heart God has tested with faith. Indeed we speak about our doctrine, [the doctrine of] the *ahl al-bayt*, to the people in different ways. For of our doctrine there is a teaching that we don't mind being spoken of even from the pulpits, for it is an ornament for us, a disgrace for our enemies, and an exoteric [teaching] for our party. Of our doctrine there is a teaching that should not be spoken of except to one or two people, and if it exceeds three then it is no longer a secret. Of our doctrine there is a teaching that is secret, concealed, and wrapped in mystery. We do not place it except in fortress-like chests and secure hearts.

What is this secret doctrine, wrapped in mystery, that only the most tested of believers can bear? According to another *ḥadīth* found in the same work "the *ṣaʿb* is acknowledging the revealed form [of ʿAlī] and the *mustaṣʿab* is submitting to [him] in worship."[494] This type of secret requires extreme caution. Thus al-Bāqir warns: [495]

> I heard it said that our doctrine is difficult and extremely arduous, harsh and terrible, exasperating and distressing (*khashin makhshūsh*[496]). Reveal it to the people little by little. If someone understands it, then give him more and if someone rejects it then withhold [the remainder] from him. Only three will bear it, a close angel, a prophet sent as an apostle, or a believing worshipper whose heart God has tested for faith.

This is how the Nuṣayrī novice was introduced to the faith. By advancing through the stages of *sharb al-sār* and *taʿlīq* he has proven himself amenable to the doctrine and ready to receive the remainder of the secret. Becoming privy to this secret transforms him into a member of the Unitarians (*muwaḥḥidūn*), those who acknowledge the divinity and unity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. As al-Bāqir is made to explain in the *Haqāʾiq Asrār al-Dīn*, "I have seen most of the Shiites bear the exoteric [meaning of Shiism], but only a few souls carry the *ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab*, and they are the Unitarians."[497]

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[494] Ibid., 19.

[495] al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*: 38.

[496] Is this a typo for *ḥiss maḥsūs*?

[497] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 107.

Recited at the *samāʿ* ceremony, this *ḥadīth* celebrates the novice's entrance into the brotherhood of those who believe in the divinity of ʿAlī. But the *ḥadīth* is not merely about insiders and outsiders; it also speaks of the continued hierarchy of religious comprehension that is present even at the highest echelons of the spiritual world. According to a famous formulation of this *ḥadīth* Muḥammad al-Baqir's father, ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, first taught him these words to explain why Shiite doctrine must be kept a secret. He told al-Bāqir that even the most devout believers in history have not been able to bear the full extent of the truth, and so the remainder of the people cannot be expected to understand it either. He is supposed to have said: [498]

> By God, had Abū Dharr [al-Ghifārī] known what was in the heart of Salmān [al-Fārisī], he would have killed him- and the prophet treated them as brothers! What then do you think would happen with the rest of the people? For the knowledge of the gnostics is difficult and extremely arduous. None can bear it but a prophet sent as an apostle, an angel that is close [to God], or a worshipper whom God has tested with faith.

Abū Dharr and Salmān, two of the most devoted supporters of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, were treated as religious equals by the Prophet Muḥammad, but according to this *ḥadīth*, even Abū Dharr could not bear the depth of knowledge that was available to Salmān. In fact, the disparity in their ability to comprehend the *ʿilm al-bāṭin* was so great that had Abū Dharr known what Salmān truly believed, he would have killed him as a heretic.

This motif became a particular favorite of the Nuṣayrī theologians who used it to confirm their belief in a spiritual hierarchy. "Al-Miqdād did not know what Salmān knew," reads a *ḥadīth* in the *Majmūʿ al-Akhbār,* "except at the level of what can be ladled with a spoon from this sea. Likewise, Salmān didn't know what Muḥammad knew except of the level of one sea behind which stretches seven seas, and like a fountainhead from which flows a rivulet."[499] This saying

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[498] al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*: 41; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*: I: 401.

[499] *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 19.

plays on the original Abū Dharr and Salmān motif, stressing the continued hierarchy of religious comprehension. At the top of this hierarchy is Muḥammad, the *ism-ḥijāb* (name-veil) who understands the most about ʿAlī, the *maʿnā* (meaning). Salmān, one rank lower, is the *bāb* (gate), but he knows less then Muḥammad. Beneath him are the five *aytām* (incomparables) identified in the persons of al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, ʿAbd Allāh b. Rawāḥa, ʿUthmān b. Maẓʿūn, and Qanbar b. Kādan, the most loyal supporters of ʿAlī, whose capacities for comprehension are likewise staggered. Thus al-Khaṣībī writes in the *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*:[500]

> No two are equal in the way they see Him. Indeed, the *ism* sees Him in a way that the *bāb* cannot for he is below him. Likewise every person in the hierarchy sees Him in a way that the person beneath him does not see. The *bāb* sees Him in a way that the great *yatīm* (incomparable) [al-Miqdād] cannot, and al-Miqdād [sees Him] in a way that Abū Dharr cannot because he is beneath him in level and rank… and Abū Dharr sees Him in a way that ʿAbd Allāh b. Rawāḥa cannot, and ʿAbd Allāh sees Him in a way that ʿUthmān b. Maẓʿūn cannot, and Uthmān sees Him in a way that Qanbar cannot."

This hierarchy proceeds from the spiritual world and continues into the material world.[501] Thus recited in the context of *samāʿ* the *ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab ḥadīth* lets the student know that even after his official entre into the community, there will still be levels upon levels of insights he will likely never understand.

But the *ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab ḥadīth* is not only about comprehension; it is also about secrecy. The imam immediately follows its recitation by asking the student "will you bear this

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[500] al-Khaṣībī, *R. al-Rāstbāshiyya*: 26-8. A similar version can be found in al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 100-1.

[501] The Nuṣayrī hierarchy proceeds for many more levels. Beneath the *aytām* Nuṣayrīs conceive of five additional exalted ranks: the *nuqabāʾ* (leaders), *nujabāʾ* (nobles), *mukhtaṣṣūn* (authorities), *mukhliṣūn* (faithful), and *mumtaḥanūn* (tested). Together all these levels make up the *ʿālam al-kabīr al-nūrānī* (the great world of light). Below this luminous world is the *ālam al-ṣaghīr al-turābī* (the small material world), comprised of seven more material positions: the *muqarrabūn* (near ones), *karūbiyyūn* (cherubs/angels), *rūḥaniyyūn* (spiritual ones), *muqaddasūn* (saints), *sāʾiḥūn* (travelers), *mustamiʿūn* (auditors), and *lāḥiqūn* (followers). The average Nuṣayrī finds himself even beneath these material ranks, with only the most devoted mystics ever making it onto the material hierarchy. See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 90-5.

doctrine?"[502]or more explicitly, "will you suffer the cutting off of your head, hands, and feet before revealing this great secret?"[503] In order to proceed, the student must insist that he will.[504] It is clear then that in the context of *samāʿ* the recitation of this *ḥadīth* was meant to gage the student's commitment to *taqiyya* and *kiṭmān al-sirr*.

Interpreting the *ḥadīth* as one about religious secrecy has precedence in the Shiite tradition. According to one version of the *ḥadīth* some Shiites wrote to the Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī asking him to explain what is meant by the statement: "*No* close angel, *no* sent prophet, and *no* believer whose heart God has tested with faith can bear our doctrine." This version of the *ḥadīth* differs from the more common, "none but (*illā*) a close angel… can bear it," but al-ʿAskarī's solution is still relevant. He responds that the term 'bear' (*ḥ-m-l*) does not refer to comprehension of the doctrine, but to the difficulty of keeping it a secret. He explains, "an angel cannot bear it until he has shared it with another angel, a prophet cannot bear it until he has shared it with another prophet, and a believer cannot bear it until he has shared it with another believer."[505] In this story the *ḥadīth* thus becomes an expression of the Imams oft-repeated grievance against the shīʿa for their inability to keep the secret; it becomes a *ḥadīth* about the inevitability of *idhāʿa* (revealing the secret).[506]

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[502] The student answers, "Yes, God willing, I will bear it." See *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 217.

[503] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5.

[504] In the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha* this exchange (recitation of cautionary *ḥadīth*, imam's question, and student's answer) is repeated seven times. See Excursus 1 at the end of this chapter where this portion of the Lyde MS is translated.

[505] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*: I: 401-2.

[506] Perhaps this formulation of the *ḥadīth* can be understood more optimistically as a statement about the perpetuity of the doctrine, which will always be passed to another angel, prophet, or believer, instead of one about the inevitability of *idhāʿa*.

This is obviously not what is intended during *samāʿ* but if al-ʿAskarī's interpretation of *ḥ-m-l* can be borrowed for our context, then by agreeing to 'bear' the doctrine the student is identifying himself with those close angels, sent prophets, and tested believers who are unique in their ability to keep the secret. This analysis does not exclude the concept of comprehension, which is obviously also inherent in the *hadith*. It simply underscores its primary objective during *samāʿ*, which is to caution the student of the need for secrecy.

Sponsors and Guarantors

The student's insistence that he will be able to bear the doctrine is not sufficient to guarantee his initiation. In most accounts of *samāʿ*, he also has to produce sponsors to back his oath. This element of the ceremony is an opportunity for the community to welcome the student into the congregation with their votes of confidence. In two of the sources, namely the *K. al-Bākūra* and the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, the presentation of sponsors also becomes an opportunity for the community to dramatize their careful preservation of the ancient *qānūn* of initiation in the face of perceived innovation.

This dramatization begins with the imam telling the student that if he truly believes himself capable of bearing the doctrine, let him provide one hundred sponsors to guarantee it.[507] The community then interjects with the objection, "*al-qānūn*!" (But the law!).[508] What is the law? The *naqīb* explains, "three during the *ḥajj* and seven when you return, totaling ten days." This is an excerpt from Q2: 196, which speaks of how one may expiate a breach in the state of *iḥrām* (consecration) required during the *ḥajj.* According to the Quranic instructions, one may

[507] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5; *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 217.

[508] In the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* the *naqīb* makes this objection.

expiate this breach by fasting for ten days, three during the *ḥajj* and seven upon return.[509] But in the context of Nuṣayrī initiation this calculation becomes the source text for the number of guarantors a student must provide during *samāʿ*.

Accepting this objection, the imam decreases the number of sponsors to ten, according to the *qānūn* of initiation.[510] Once these are chosen, the imam makes the sponsors pledge that they will kill the student if he ever breaks his oath. This element of the ceremony is quite graphic, with the sponsors promising that the student's "sin will require [his] neck,"[511] and that if he ever reveals the secret they "will bring him to [the imam] so that we may cut him to pieces and drink his blood."[512]

In acknowledgement of their sponsorship, the student is made to drink a sip of *ʿabd al-nūr* in a ceremony called *sirr al-ʿashara* (the mystery of the ten). The *naqīb* instructs him to say, "to your *sirr*, my ten brothers, sponsor and guarantee me for the secret of God. You are absolved of my sin and my sin will require my neck." [513] The ten respond in kind, permitting him to drink to their *sirr* and announcing that although God absolves them of his future infractions, they will personally guarantee that these are punished by death.[514]

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[509] Fasting as a means of expiation is only if a person cannot afford to sacrifice an animal, which is the preferred method of expiation.

[510] *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 217. Ten sponsors are also required by the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha* (MS Lyde 17: 177.) But in the *K. al-Bākūra*, the number of sponsors required by the *qānūn* is twelve. (al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5.) No explanation is provided for this figure, although twelve is a number of great theological significance, so its presence here is not surprising.

[511] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 217.

[512] Al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5.

[513] *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 217.

[514] Perhaps the absolution is for killing him? In other words, the sponsors are informing the student that they will kill him if he ever reveals the secret and that God will absolve them of this violence.

Even the sponsorship of the ten does not satisfy the imam, for as he explains in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, "the sponsors are perishable and ten are many." These two objections refer to the possibilities that, firstly, should the ten sponsors die, there would be no one to guarantee the student's oath and secondly, if so many men are assigned to the job, it is possible that none will take personal initiative to bring the student to justice. The imam therefore demands two additional sponsors "who are close to him," who will serve as guarantors for the ten and who will be able to keep a particularly close eye on the student.[515] Once these are appointed, they are made to swear that if the student "runs off before completing his memorization of the prayers, or if he reveals the secret" they will bring him before the imam "so that we may end his life."[516]

The appointment of the additional two sponsors is also sealed with the drinking of *ʿabd al-nūr*.[517] This rite is not named in either the *K. al-Bākūra* or the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*. However, in the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha*, the drinking of *ʿabd al-nūr* after the appointment of sponsors is called *sirr al-thintayn* (the mystery of the two).[518] This designation would correspond to the title of the rite consecrating the ten sponsors (*sirr al-ʿashara*). The term has not been previously explained this way. Lyde translated the term *sirr al-thintayn* as "mystery of the two masses," for in the context is written that the *naqīb* will give the student to drink "the secret of the two, after he shall have read them."[519] The two masses are the *quddās al-awwal* and *quddās*

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[515] It is possible that according to the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha* the two additional sponsors are the *naqīb* and *sayyid.* It says "then hand him over to his ten brothers and the sponsors make him swear and then hand him over to the *naqīb* [sic] to his *sayyid*."(MS Lyde 17: 177.) I am not sure if what is intended here is that they should hand him over to the *naqīb* and his *sayyid*, which could be understood as the two who guarantee the ten, or simply that the *naqīb* then hands him over to his *sayyid.*

[516] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 6.

[517] *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 218.

[518] MS Lyde 17: 177. In the MS it is written colloquially as *sirr al-tintayn.*

[519] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 264.

al-thānī, which are read prior to drinking *ʿabd al-nūr* in general assemblies, so it is understandable why Lyde thought to translate the term in this way.[520]

An entirely different explanation for the term *sirr al-thintayn* is proposed by the *K. taʿlīm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya* (Catechism of the Nuṣayrī Religion found in MS Paris Arabe 6182). This catechism is a digest of the doctrines found in the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha* and is therefore useful for defining the ambiguous terms in this work. Indeed, question 82 of the catechism describes *sirr al-thintayn* as "the mystery of the veiling of our master in light, namely the eye of the sun, and his manifestation in his servant, *ʿabd al-nūr*." According to this explanation the term *sirr al-thintayn* is meant to be understood as 'the Mystery of Duality' i.e. the mystery of the dual spiritual and corporeal natures of the Godhead, epitomized by his appearance in *ʿabd al-nūr*. A gloss in the margins of the manuscript supports this designation when it adds, "know that this mystery is also called the mystery of good and evil, the mystery of light and darkness, the mystery of water and fire, the mystery of flesh and blood, the mystery of food and drink, the mystery of death and life, the mystery of heat and cold, and the mystery of Nawrūz and Mihrajān."[521]

This same gloss is repeated in the margins of MS Paris Arabe 6182's account of *samāʿ* (which is copied verbatim from the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha*) where the *naqīb* is instructed to present the student to his sponsors and give him *sirr al-thintayn* to drink.[522] It is obvious that whoever added both these glosses to MS Arabe 6182 understood the term *sirr al-thintayn* as a general designation for *ʿabd al-nūr* and not one unique to the ceremony of the two sponsors. As

[520] MS Lyde 17: 126-38.

[521] Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*: 192-3, 217.

[522] MS Arabe 6182: 36.

the ideal representation of the hypostatic duality of the Godhead, it is entirely possible that *ʿabd al-nūr* was at times called by this name, however, it is doubtful that this is what is intended during *samāʿ*. In most instances that the student is instructed to drink *ʿabd al-nūr* during his initiation, it is drunk to the *sirr* of present individuals (the imam, the *sayyid*, the congregation, the ten sponsors etc.), and not to abstract theological concepts.[523] It is therefore unlikely that this occasion, which celebrates the appointment of sponsors, should be any different. What is more likely is that that the term *sirr al-thintayn* refers to the mystery of the two sponsors just as the *sirr al-ʿashara* referred to the mystery of the ten.

Even these additional sponsors do not persuade the imam to endorse the student's entrance into the sect, for as he explains in the *K. al-Bākūra*, "The sponsors may perish and the sponsors of the sponsors may perish; I want something from him that will last."[524] But, of course, "nothing lasts except the Eternally Living and Preexistent God,"[525] and so the imam requires the student to swear directly to Him.

In the *STA K. al-Mashyakha,* the bargaining over sponsorship continues, with the imam demanding that the student pledge one hundred oaths to God and the *naqīb* interjecting with the same objection, "*al-qānūn, yā sayyidī*" (but the Law, my master!). The law in this instance is that the student must pledge eighty oaths to God. This is based on the saying, "In the form of one followed by two, up to eighty, no more, no less" (*fī qālib wāḥid yataluhu thāniya, ilā al-thamanīn, lam tanquṣ lam tazid*).[526]

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[523] Exceptions are drinking to the *sirr al-qubūl (160a, 167a)* and *sirr ʻa-m-s*, but these are essential for initiation, and not new concepts.

[524] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 6.

[525] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 218.

[526] Ibid. I have not been able to trace the origin of this rule. My only lead so far is that eighty is the number of lashes prescribed by the Quran (24:4) for a person who falsely accuses a woman of adultery. Since the *qānūn* of ten

The communal insistence that the imam adhere to this *qānūn* affirms that which is already obvious from our analysis of the different rites: that some sort of urtext or urtradition must have existed that spelled out the *qānūn* of initiation. There is no other explanation for the general conformity of our various sources. Some broad features of this *qānūn* undoubtedly derived from al-Ṭabarānī's *K. al-Ḥāwī* but its details must have come from some other as yet undiscovered source. The imam's scripted attempt to break with this *qānūn* by demanding more than the required number of sponsors and oaths provides an opportunity for the community to assert its conformity to the ancient law, even against the instructions of their imam. By policing the *qānūn* in this most brazen manner, the community assures itself that this initiation, which is definitionally a breach in the code of secrecy, is completely lawful and free of possibly disqualifying innovations.

Before describing the actual content of the oath, it is important to appreciate the inherent drama of this element of the ceremony, which cannot but fill the student with awe. All others present have seen initiation many times and know the games involved. But it is the first time for the student and he (theoretically) has no clue that when the imam demands one hundred sponsors, he will only be required to provide ten, and once these are sworn in with grave threats and *ʿabd al-nūr*, he will have to find an additional two, whose sponsorship will also prove insufficient. When the student finally arrives at the grand oath of *samāʿ*, and the number of pledges required has been agreed upon, he is well aware of the severity of his oath and is filled with determination to uphold it in the face of all hardships and even death.

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witnesses was based on a *bāṭinī* reading of Islamic law, it is likely that the *qānūn* of eighty oaths also derives from a *baṭinī* interpretation of this system.

Some Implications of the Communal Involvement in this Rite

The process of bargaining over sponsors and oaths is also significant because it is the first time that the community acts as real players in the initiation. Their broader involvement mirrors the theoretical life-cycle progression of initiation described by al-Ṭabarānī. If during *taʿlīq* the student was likened to a wife who may only interact with her husband, during *samāʿ* he is likened to a son who may be mentored by the entire community. Thus for the first time we see members of the community vouch for the student as sponsors, we see the student drink *ʿabd al-nūr* to their *sirr*, and we see the congregation policing the imam over his adherence to the *qānūn*.

The transition from private to public participation implied by these rites is expressed even more plainly in some accounts of *samāʿ* where, before allowing the student to take the oath that will officially seal his membership, the imam reformulates and broadens the stipulations of his initiation. During *taʿlīq* the student was made to swear that he would observe the ritual obligations and obey his *sayyid.* These requirements reflect the private relationship of *taʿlīq*, where the student need only concern himself with God and his private mentor. But as the student officially enters the community, his obligations expand to include the entire community of believers. As the imam says in the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha*: [527]

> I command you do one thing and prohibit you from doing another; and if you disobey either one of them, it will be the cause of your destruction. You will leave the pale of the faith and will [be made] to return to the rank of imperfection… The first commandment is to take care of your brothers, to show them respect, affability, and love. Maintain a relationship with them during their [times of] bereavement and recovery, and everything that you desire for yourself, you should desire for them. Know that a fifth of your property is absolutely allowed to them every year. Uphold the prayer in its time, give alms to whom it is due, be constant in your performance of the ritual obligations and hasten to uphold the duties and requirements. Act towards your *sayyid* with compliance, supplication, gratitude, and remembrance, acting for him in every way you can that he may want, and avoiding every wrong thing he despises. The second command is to

[527] MS Lyde 17: 171-2.

guard against wronging your brethren. Do not act hostilely towards any of them. Spare their infractions, do not act contrary to their desires, and avoid harming them.

Here the obligations to observe the ritual obligations and treat his *sayyid* with respect appear almost as an afterthought to the student's primary obligations to aid his fellow believers and to avoid causing them harm. This shift corresponds with the student's newly achieved status as a believer. Having been reborn a son of his *sayyid*, he is now interwoven in the community through esoteric bonds of consanguinity and must treat all members of the faith as spiritual relatives.

But *samāʿ* does not only connect believers to each other, it connects them with God. As al-Ṭabarānī taught in his *K. al-Ḥāwī*, a person's *nasab*, achieved through *samāʿ*, is the "cord that connects to God," for it establishes a person in a religious pedigree that traces back to the earliest gnostics who studied directly with the deity on earth.[528] God takes this relationship seriously, championing the rights of believers as though they were His own and treating all infringements against them as personal affronts. Thus after listing the student's new responsibilities, the imam immediately warns him that his communal interactions will become the measure by which he will earn reward and punishment. He says: [529]

Know that blindness is caused by gazing at their wives with an improper eye, deafness is caused by listening to slander and calumny about them, leprosy and

[528] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 60.

[529] MS Lyde 17: 173. In the *Sharḥ al-imām*'s account of *samāʿ*, the student is also taught that his future reward and punishment will directly result from his dealings with believers. The imam explains: "know, may God grant you success, that everything I have mentioned to you [about reward and punishment] is with reference to your treatment of the brethren, good for good and bad for bad. As He says, may He be exalted, 'for whatever good deed you may offer up on your own behalf, you shall truly find it with God, better, and richer in reward' (Q73: 20)." Based on this principle, the imam instructs the student not to "put on airs over any of the believers, for arrogance displays a lack of submissiveness to the One who commands your submission." (See MS Arabe 1450: 164a.) This instruction echoes the longer list found in the *Lyde K. al-Mashyaka* and is representative of the student's new communal responsibilities activated during *samāʿ*. There is also a long discussion of the different diseases that correspond to various infractions against fellow believers in *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-akhbār*: 69-71. See also ibid., 106 for a variant of the expression "the cord of believers is connected with the cord of their master".

> elephantiasis is caused by ridiculing them and belittling their station; poverty and want [come] from being miserly and withholding from them. There is no malady, be it apparent or hidden (exoteric or esoteric) that is not caused on account of them. For the cord of believers is connected with the cord of their Master, his anger [is connected] to their anger and his pleasure to their pleasure.

Having become party to this secret, the newly initiated student is instructed to take extra care in his interactions with believers so as not to awaken the wrath of God who champions their honor.

When the student agrees to uphold these responsibilities, he offsets the potential risks associated with his initiation with the promise of his financial and emotional support. Thus, through initiation, the integrity of the community is strengthened even as it is threatened, which may be one reason why it persisted even in times of considerable danger.

The Obligation of Mutual Identification

According to the *STA K. al-Mashyakha,* one final step must be taken before the student can swear his oath: he must provide evidence of his having progressed through the previous stages of initiation. The imam demands that the student recite "that which his *sayyid* taught him [at the previous ceremony]." This instruction likely refers to the three letters of the *kalima al-ʿāliya*, first revealed to the student during *taʿlīq*.[530] If he does this correctly the imam announces, "Bear witness, my brothers, that he has revealed himself to me [as an initiate] before I reveal myself to him."[531]

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[530] A footnote in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* elaborates that in response to this request the student recites his *samāʿ*. This is the same word that was used for the *kalima al-ʿāliya* in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha's* description of the *taʿlīq* ceremony: "they recite to him the letters of the *samāʿ*, letter by letter and they give him to drink a mouthful for every letter until the three letters are complete, the mystery of the pact of *ʿayn*, the mystery of the pact of *ʿayn-mīm*, the mystery of the pact of *ʿayn-mīm-sīn*" *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 216.

[531] Ibid., 218.

The imam's insistence that the student provide evidence of his initiation is obviously not necessary; everyone present knows that he has progressed through *sharb al-sār* and *taʿlīq*, moreover there should be written documentation that he has done so.[532] He demands this proof to demonstrate the strict measures the student must adopt in order to ensure the secrecy of the doctrine. He has already experienced some of these measures, including holding religious gatherings at night and in private homes, from his own initiation. These measures allow the community to monitor who joins in. But there are other measures as well. In his *K. al-Ḥāwī* al-Ṭabarānī insists that believers provide evidence of their belonging by correctly reciting their religious pedigrees before being allowed to drink *ʿabd al-nūr*.[533] He also writes that if a stranger arrives claiming to be an initiate, proof must be obtained either by traveling to his village or by writing to his shaykhs before he can join in.[534]

It seems that over time a more efficient system of verifying membership was developed. The *K. al-Bākūra* and MS Taymūr 564 provide lists of secret questions and answers by which Nuṣayrīs are taught to recognize each other among strangers.[535] According to MS Taymūr 564 the final of these exchanges requires the stranger to demonstrate his knowledge of the *kalima al-ʿaliya* and the *sirr ʿa-m-s*.[536] This is exactly what the imam requires of the student during *samāʿ*. At this point in his initiation the student is still technically a religious stranger and must demonstrate his credentials before being allowed to join the community.

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[532] See the *Sharḥ al-imām*'s instructions for documenting the date of the *taʿlīq* ceremony: "let the *naqīb* write the date and time and name of month [of the ceremony] so that there will be no disagreement over the amount of time and months to the night of the *samāʿ* ceremony" (MS Arabe 1450: 160a).

[533] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 60.

[534] Ibid.

[535] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 82-3; MS Taymūr, *ʿAqāʾid* 564: 22-4. See excursus 2 at the end of this chapter.

[536] MS Taymūr, *ʿAqāʾid* 564: 23-4.

The Oath of Secrecy

The obligation of mutual identification becomes a major element of the oath in which the student swears that he will only speak of the secret with believers who have provided proof of their membership. The form of this oath is not identical in all of the sources; the *Sharḥ al-imām* has the imam read the terms with the student simply agreeing and the *K. al-Bākūra* provides the content of the oath but not its actual words.[537] The different versions also vary in length. However, the content of the oath is always the same. The following is the version found in the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha*:[538]

> One oath to God, two oaths to God, three oaths to God (*Wallāh, Billāh, Tallāh*), seven oaths to God: I am firm in God and in what you reveal to me of the secret of God! I will not sell it, nor announce it, nor argue over it with it with the *juhhāl* (uninitiated), nor make myself known by it to any man except to one of my brothers who has revealed himself, and if I do other than this, I shall be dissociated from God, His Book, His apostle, and God is trustee and witness to what I say! (Then he says) One oath to God, two oaths to God (*Wallāh, Billāh*) and another oath to God,[539] seven oaths to God, a great oath, and by what was taken from the prophets as an oath and covenant. I am firm in God and in what you will reveal to me of the secret of God. I will conceal everything I hear and learn from my *sayyid* and I will follow what he directs me to do and abstain from what he forbids me. God is trustee and witness over what I say! (Then he says) One oath to God, two oaths to God, three oaths to God, seven oaths to God, eighty oaths to God, forty standing and forty sitting. I am firm in God and what you reveal to me of the secret of God I will not sell, and will not reveal and will not command to be written to someone who has no right to it, not in your life nor after your death, not in a state of covetousness, nor in a state of contentment, nor in a state of hardship. I am also under these conditions: I will abstain from everything that harms my brethren, from killing, fornication, (anything) forbidden, corruption, lying, aiding [the enemies?], usury, and the like. I will not reveal that

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[537] All al-Adhanī writes is that after grave warnings he was made to swear that he "will not reveal this secret for as long as I live." (*K. al-Bākūra*: 6.) It is unclear whether these were the actual words of the oath or just a summary.

[538] MS Lyde 17: 174-7.

[539] It says *wa-thānī wallāh* (and a second oath to God) but I think this must be a scribal error for *tallāh* (three oaths), which is what appears throughout the oath.

> which you make known to me of the secret of God to any of God's creatures, except to one of my brothers who makes himself known to me and I to him; and if I act contrary to this, I will be dissociated from God, His book, and His apostle. God is trustee and witness to what I say. God will violate the contract with the one who violates it.

The above version of the oath is quoted because it incorporates most elements found in the other sources. The first of these is the counting of the oaths, which appears in all versions of *samāʿ*. The *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha* specifies that the student must pledge "eighty oaths to God, forty standing and forty sitting" and has him do this in the abbreviated form, *Wallāh Billāh* and *Tallāh*, one, two, and three, oaths to God. The *STA K. al-Mashyakha* also insists on eighty oaths but has the student count these with ordinal numbers, "*awwal yamīn billāh, thānī yamīn billāh, thālith yamīn billāh*" (first, second, third… oath to God).[540] Sulaymān al-Adhanī writes that he only had to pledge three oaths to God, but qualifies that the *ʿāmma* (the masses), particularly those of Latakia, are made to swear many more.[541] The only account that doesn't specify the number of pledges necessary is the *Sharḥ al-imām*. This work simply opens each stipulation of the oath with, "*Wallāh, Wallāh, Wallāh, wa-Billāh*" (by God, by God, by God, and in [the name] of God) or "*Wallāh, Wallāh, wa-yamīn Allāh,*[542] *wa-Billāh* (by God, by God, I swear by God and in God).[543]

The oath can be understood as a non-disclosure agreement. In return for initiation the student promises that he will not reveal the secret to the uninitiated, either by tongue or in writing. He also agrees to identify believers as such according to the rules of mutual

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540 *STA K. al-Mashyakha*: 218,20.

541 al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 6.

542 Written, *yāmin Allāh.*

543 This occurs five times throughout the oath. See, MS Arabe 1450: 164b, 65a, 65b.

identification before speaking to them of the secret. These terms are spelled out most concisely in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* in which the entire body of the oath is: [544]

> [I swear eighty oaths to God that] this secret that my *sayyid*, shaykh, and guide (so and so) imparts to me is what I will not spread nor sell nor engrave upon stone nor upon clay nor will I give it to a female nor to a male except to one of my brothers whom I know and who has revealed himself to me and I have revealed myself to him. God upon what I say is witness and trustee.

The *Sharḥ al-imām* includes more details, specifying, as does the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha,* the period of non-disclosure: "not in our lives, nor after our deaths," and the different states in which it is valid: "not in a state of anger, nor in a state of contentment, nor in a state of resistance, nor in a state of fear, nor in a state of covetousness, nor in a state of hardship, nor in a state of ambitious desire, nor in state of deprivation, and even if it does not suit me."[545] There is no state that will excuse a breach of this oath. The *K. al-Bākūra* encapsulates this fact in its characteristically graphic manner by demanding that the student agree to "suffer the cutting off of [his] head, hands and feet, before disclosing this great secret."[546]

The repercussions of breaking this oath are described in both the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha* and the *Sharḥ al-imām* as "dissociation from God, his prophet, his close angels… the *Tawrāt* (Torah), the *Injīl* (Gospels), the *Zabūr* (Psalms), the *Quran*, and the *Dhikr al-ʿaẓīm* (the Great

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[544] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 218. The oath in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* is repeated with additional instructions on p.220-1. The *Sharḥ al-imām* also includes the speaking or writing stipulations: "I will not entrust it to any creature by tongue nor will I write it on a sheet of a book, not by my hand..." (MS Arabe 1450: 165a).

[545] MS Arabe 1450: 165a.

[546] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 5. In the previous chapter I indicated that such graphic warnings might be evidence of exaggeration by al-Adhanī. It should be noted that the cutting off of hands and feet appears in other Nuṣayrī works as the punishment for those who reveal the secret. For example, The *K. Ḥaqāʾiq Asrār al-Dīn* quotes a certain (non-extant) *K. Ādāb al-Dīn* of Jaʿfar b Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal (b ʿUmar), which states, "whoever sought knowledge from you and gave any measure of it away, regardless of whether it was to his kin or enemy, cut off his hand and foot. For God has said (Q5: 38), 'As to the thief, Male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from Allah, for their crime.' Male and female thieves are those who hypocritically seek the knowledge of God [with intent to share it]," (al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 136). However, in this context, the punishment of cutting off the limbs is not either taken literally and is instead interpreted as removing his knowledge by means of disinformation in order to confuse him about what he previously heard, (ibid., 135-6).

Rememrance- the *Dustūr*?).[547] The *Sharḥ al-imām* more concretely adds that if the initiate ever discloses the secret he will be triply divorced from all of his wives, which is standard fare for apostates.[548] Though it is not repeated in the body of the oath, the student has already been informed that a breach will require his death[549] and that even after death he will find no peace. As al-Adhanī was warned upon taking his own oath, "The earth will not accept you for burial if you reveal this secret. You will not return to enter into human bodies, but upon your death you will enter bodies of degrading reincarnations, from which you will never have salvation."[550] For disclosing the secret, the believer will be made to suffer *maskh*, reincarnation in the bodies of animals, vegetables, and minerals.

Other obligations stipulated in the oath of both the *Lyde K. al-Mashyakha* and the *Sharḥ al-imām* are that the student observe the ritual obligations, obey his *sayyid*, and avoid anything that might harm his new co-religionists.[551] The implications of these requirements were described above.

There is some disagreement of how the oath of secrecy should be made. According to the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* the student pledges this oath before the imam with a Quran in his left hand and his right hand raised. Sulaymān al-Adhanī, on the other hand, writes that his oath was taken over the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, which was placed in his right hand.[552] It is possible that these two

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[547] MS Arabe 1450: 164b-65b.

[548] Ibid., 164b.

[549] This was the apparent outcome of al-Adhanī's publication of his book revealing the secrets of the Nuṣayrī religion.

[550] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 6.

[551] The *Sharḥ al-imām* version can be found in MS Arabe 1450: 165b-66b.

[552] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 6.

reports reflect different ideological positions, with the usage of the Quran representing a more Islamic identity and the *K. al-Majmūʿ* (*Dustūr*) representing one that is more sectarian. As the other sources provide no details, it is uncertain which usage is older or more common. While pledging on the Quran certainly makes sense for a community that claims guardianship over its true meanings, it is exactly the oath of *samāʿ* that grants the student access to the *K. al-Majmūʿ* (and it is after all the content of this work the student is swearing to protect). Moreover, all accounts of the *samāʿ* ceremony conclude with readings from the *K. al-Majmūʿ* while verses of the Quran are mainly quoted circumstantially in the ceremony, so it certainly seems that the *K. al-Majmūʿ* is more integral to *samāʿ*. It is possible that the oath on the Quran is a modern accommodation in line with other efforts of the sect at Islamification.

In any event, even if the use of the Quran in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha* reflects a greater espousal of Islamic identity, it does not represent a move towards Islamic orthodoxy, for immediately after the student swears the oath and the *sayyid* receives permission to initiate him, he reads to him from the *āyat at-kursī* (Q2: 255).[553] This verse, which describes God's powers, conveniently ends with the words *wa-huwa al-ʿalī al-ʿaẓīm*, traditionally translated as "He is the most high, most great."[554] Read instead as "He is the great ʿAlī," this verse serves as a prooftext for the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, which is the core belief of the Nuṣayrī religion and the substance of the student's initiation by his *sayyid*. In case the student did not understand the implication of this verse, the imam explicitly asks him, "who is *al-ʿalī al-aẓīm*?" and after

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[553] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 219-20.

[554] The full verse reads: "God - there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain]. His throne (*kursī)* overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And he alone is the most high the great."

explaining the answer to him announces, "today you have sensed the truth!"[555] It is possible that the recitation of this crucial Quranic verse is one reason that the oath is pledged on the Quran instead of on a *K. al-Majmūʿ*.

Readings from the K. al-Majmūʿ

As mentioned above, all versions of *samāʿ* conclude with the *sayyid* reading to his student selections from the *fatḥ, sujūd,* and *salām* chapters (five, seven, and six of the *K. al-Majmūʿ*).[556] The specific portions read are never listed but as all of these chapters discuss the divinity of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, it is likely that those portions were chosen and that they functioned in the same manner as the *āyat al-kursī* in the *STA K. al-Mashyakha*, as a formal introduction to the central secret of the religion. These readings are also significant because they are the first introduction the student is given to the *K. al-Majmūʿ*, which is handed to him at the conclusion of *samāʿ* and which he must memorize in the month following his ceremony.

Finally, the student has become a member of the congregation. One last drink of *ʿabd al-nūr* celebrates his entrance into the sect; after kissing the hands of those present the ceremony is over and the student retires to the home of his *sayyid* to begin his studies.

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[555] *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 220.

[556] *MS Arabe 1450*: 166b. (only the fatḥ is mentioned); *MS Lyde 17*: 177. (fatḥ, sujjūd, salām read); al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 7.(fatḥ, sujjūd, salām, and ʿayn (ch. 9) read); *STA K. al-Mashyakha:* 219, 20. (fatḥ, sujjūd, salām read. Instructrions are also given for the congregants to recite specific prayers while the sayyid is reading from these chapters). The contents of these chapters of the *K. al-Majmūʿ* as summarized by Friedman are: "Chapter 5, *al-Fatḥ* (victory): Acknowledging that ʿAlī is the creator of the world and that the *ism*, the *bāb*, and the *aytām* were created fro his light; a prayer for victory over the enemies of the sect. Chapter 6, *al-Sujūd* (worship), Repetition of the declaration *Allāhu akbar* (God is the greatest) three times; declaration of worship of the one abstract God; citing of the *Ayat al-nūr* (verse of light in the Qurʾān). Chapter 7, *al-Salām* (peace/blessing): Self-definition of the believer as a Muslim; blessing of the triad and the *ahl al-marātib…* Chapter 9, *al-ʿAyn al-ʿAlawiyya* (the heavenly eye/ letter *ʿayn*): Declaration of belief in the triad and the secret of *ʿayn-mīm-sīn.*" (Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 295-6.)

Tafaqquh and the *ʿĀmma-Khāṣṣa* Distinction

The conclusion of *samāʿ* marks the beginning of the 'breastfeeding' or 'fiqh learning' stage of initiation. We know that this stage involves the memorization of the *K. al-Majmūʿ/Dustūr* in the month following the ceremony, but it may continue for up to two years of guided instruction in the esoteric writings of the sect.[557] It is possible that the distinction between the short and long periods of study is what differentiates the *ʿāmma* (masses) and *khāṣṣa* (elite), a distinction that can be found throughout the later writings of the sect. It is also possible that these terms simply refer to uninitiated and initiated Nuṣayrīs, as in the case of the Druze *ʿuqqāl* (wise ones) and *juhhāl* (ignorant ones).[558] With the sect's evolution from an open prostlytyzing society to a closed tribal community, it makes sense that the hierarchical distinction between the *ʿāmma* and *khāṣṣa* should have been drawn inwards, but exactly where and how these lines were drawn is unclear. Al-Adhanī writes that both the *ʿāmma* and *khāṣṣa* are initiated but that different lengths of time are required for their respective *taʿlīq* stages.[559] Lyde's experience in Latakia,[560] and the Procházkas' field research in Cilicia[561] also led them to state that all Nuṣayrī males (born of two Nuṣayrī parents) are at least in principle initiated. This would imply that that the distinction between the *ʿāmma* and *khaṣṣa* emerges from some other criterion, possibly the

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[557] See discussion Chapter Two.

[558] Nejla M. Abu-Izzeddin, *The Druzes: A New Study of their History, Faith, and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 223-5.

[559] Al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*, 3.

[560] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*, 159.

[561] Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints*, 90-1.

length of time one studies after entering the sect. Friedman, however, supports the second interpretation, positing a hierarchical distinction along the lines of the Druze.[562]

It is possible, of course, that there was some evolution in this matter. The Procházkas have observed that contemporary social and linguistic changes among Turkish ʿAlawites has meant that many youths no longer have the Arabic necessary to memorize the prayers and are forgoing initiation.[563] It is obvious that if ʿAlawite identity is to survive this development, a new criterion of belonging will have to be defined. It is likely that similar accomodations were made throughout the course of Nuṣayri history and that the terms *ʿāmma* and *khāṣṣa* held different meanings at different times.

In any event, as al-Ṭabarānī makes clear, the longer period of post-initiation education is necessary if the novice ever wants to take on students of his own.[564] Furthermore, while there is currently no information on this process, it is likely that in such a highly structured religious environment certain procedures existed for the investiture of shaykhs, imams, naqībs, and the like. It is clear from the novice's initiation that a rigid hierarchy exists, even on the correct side of membership. It is probable that many of these ranks are determined by how well the novice distinguishes himself in the years following his initiation.

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[562] Friedman, *Nuṣayrī ʿAlawīs*, 144-6. As will be seen in the appendix on ritual libertinism, the *ʿuqqāl – juhhāl* distinction is made throughout MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564, even using this very terminology.

[563] Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *Plain of Saints*, 92.

[564] Al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Ḥāwī*, 51.

Excursus 1: *Khiṭāb al-tilmīdh baʿd al-sūʾāl* in MS Lyde 17, 162-71

In the portion of the Lyde manuscript translated below the exchange between the imam and student over whether he will be able to bear the weighty doctrine is repeated seven times. The length of this part of the ceremony is unique to the Lyde *K. al-Mashyakha* and is likely why the chapter on *samāʿ* in that work is titled *Khiṭāb al-tilmīdh baʿd al-sūʾāl*. This discourse is available from Lyde's translation,[565] but I include my own version here to give a sense of the significance of the *ḥadīth*, which is repeated in this ceremony, almost like a mantra. As will be seen from my translation, several other *ḥadīth*s relating to the weightiness of the doctrine and the need to keep it a secret are also mentioned.

You [the imam] shall say: Know, may God grant you success so that you may be rightly guided to attain your wish, that you have prepared yourself to seek a great matter and an awesome discourse, for it is the secret of secrets and the doctrine of the righteous. None put pious breasts [*ṣudūr taqiyya*—may also be a play on the concept of secrecy i.e. dissimulating breasts] and pure intellects can comprehend it, and none but [those with] insightful hearts and jewel-like intellects will receive it. Our master al-Ṣādiq (blessings) has said, "Whoever readily receives our knowledge, it opens the lock of his heart, so that he becomes wise (*faqīḥ*). But whoever receives it with doubt and uncertainty will continue to be removed from us." As He says, (may He be exalted), "We will bestow upon you a weighty message" (Q73: 5).

The student shall say: You will find me, God willing, to be of the patient.

You shall say: Know, may God, may He be exalted, grant you success, that that which you desire

[565] Lyde, *Asian Mystery*: 258-61.

from me is a noble secret, a great discourse, a lofty knowledge, and a weighty danger. For the mountains cannot bear it and the people of error will not receive it. My mind will not permit me to reveal it on account of the greatness and dignity of its station. For it is the healing medicine for anyone who keeps it, professes it, and guards it and a lethal poison to one who reveals and discloses it to those who have no right to it. For it is difficult and extremely arduous (*ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab*). Know that if you learn it and doubt or uncertainty concerning it shall enter your mind, or if you reveal it to the unworthy, or disclose it to those who have no right to it, you will be of the squanderers who are the brothers of the devils. By this you will have merited [the punishment] of transmigration into degrading forms and be made to walk in lowly incarnations. Have you not heard what is narrated of our Master the Commander of the Faithful, (blessings), "our knowledge is difficult and perceived as such; none can bear it except a close angel, a sent prophet, or a believer whose heart God has tested with knowledge and faith." Your position is free before you learn this secret but know that if you learn it and then deny it, or doubt or uncertainty regarding it enters your mind, you will be cast into degrading reincarnations and will transmigrate continually [in the domes] and be tortured in the eras. So be careful what you choose!

The student shall say: I am, God willing, firm in the knowledge of God, Most High.

Then you shall say: May God affirm you in the firm doctrine, in this life and the next, and make what you will hear of the hidden secret of God Most High, secure and not deposited [to others].

Then he shall say: Favor me, my master, with the knowledge of God, Most High.

You shall say: That which you desire of me is a great matter, a lofty knowledge, a noble secret,

and a mighty discourse, for it is difficult and extremely arduous (*ṣaʿb mustasʿab*). Have you not heard that which is narrated of Bāqir al-ʿilm (blessings) who said, “our secret is a concealed secret, it is difficult and extremely arduous (*ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab*); none can bear it but a close angel, or a prophet sent as an apostle, or a believer whose heart God has tested with knowledge and faith. For there are many angels and none of them can bear our knowledge except the close ones, and there are many prophets and none of them can bear our knowledge except those that were sent [as apostles], and there are many believers and none of them can bear our knowledge except for those that were tested.” Now you are free prior to hearing it but know that if you hear it from me and you deposit it [with someone else] or reveal it to someone who is unworthy of it then God will make you taste the heat of iron and its cold. So meditate on what you will choose.

He shall say: I am, God willing, firm in the knowledge of God, Most High.”

You shall say: May God affirm you in the firm saying in this world and the next and make that which you shall hear of the hidden secret of God secure and not deposited.

The boy shall say: Favor me my master with the knowledge of God, Most High.

You shall say: That which you desire of me is a noble secret, a great discourse, a lofty knowledge, and a weighty danger. The mountains will not bear it and the people of error will not accept it. My mind will not allow me to reveal it due to the greatness and nobility of its power. For it is the healing medicine for the one who keeps it, professes it, and guards it, and a lethal poison for the one who reveals it to those who have no right to it. For it is difficult and extremely arduous (*ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab*). Have you not heard that which is narrated of al-ʿĀlim (blessings) who said, “our saying is difficult and extremely arduous, a sense that is perceived [*ḥiss maḥsūs*- the *Imāmī* versions say *khashan*

makhshūsh, see above]; none can bear it but a close angel, or a sent prophet, or a believer whose heart God has tested with knowledge and faith." [He also said], "Our saying is a concealed secret hidden in mystery. Do not deposit it except into fortified breasts and secure hearts." He also said, "the bosoms of the free are the fortresses of the secrets." He also said, "Whoever deposits knowledge with those who have no right to it has sinned and for his action [will be made to feel] repentant." He also said, "Whoever deposits knowledge in one who is unworthy of it is as one who hangs pearls on the necks of swine." He also said, "Beware of divulging the secret for it cuts off sustenance and shortens life." He also said, "Whoever reveals our secret, we will cause him to taste the heat of iron and its cold." So heed this saying with your intellect and conduct yourself according to it with your actions. For you are free before you hear this secret. So meditate on what you will choose because after the vow (*nadhr*) no precaution remains. For *maskh* (degrading reincarnation) after confirmation only occurs from having doubt after faith and uncertainty after conviction.

He shall say: I am firm in the knowledge of God, Most High.

You shall say, May God affirm you in the firm saying in this life and the next and make what you will hear of the hidden secret of God, Most High, secure and not deposited, firm and not repudiated.

He shall say: Favor me my master with the knowledge of God, Most High.

Excursus 2: Secret Questions for Mutual Identification

Both the *K. al-Bākūra* (82-3) and MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564 (22-4) include lists of secret questions for mutual identification of believers. The first six are identical in both texts. The final exchange is only found in MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564. The questioning is conceived to play out as follows: a man wishing to establish his membership might approach a group of Nuṣayrīs and say, "I have a relative, do you know him?" To which they will answer, "what is his name?" He replies, "his name is al-Ḥusayn" to which they will answer "Ibn Ḥamdān" and he will conclude, "al-Khasībī." This code, beginning innocuously with an exchange with which any man might approach a group of strangers, gradually reveals the interlocutors to be followers of al-Khaṣībī, the founder of the sect.

Each additional question in the series deals with increasingly specific information about Nuṣayrī beliefs and allows the man to demonstrate his familiarity with Nuṣayrī doctrines and liturgy and particularly with the *Dustūr* which only initiates should have been able to read. For example, in the second stage of questioning the stranger is asked, "your uncle was unsettled for how many periods?" to which he must respond "sixteen." The uncle in question likely refers to the man's *sayyid* who is often called an uncle (*ʿamm*) while the number sixteen probably refers to the *Dustūr* which was taught to the man by his *sayyid* and which is comprised of sixteen chapters. The sixteenth chapter of the *Dustūr*, titled *al-nuqabāʾ*, begins with a quotation of Q50: 36 "they wandered (*fa-naqqabū*) through the land, was there any place of escape?" which might be why the uncle in question is described as being "unsettled." The *sayyid* is sometimes also called a *naqīb* and although the *nuqabāʾ* chapter of the *Dustūr* is specifically dedicated to the original *nuqabāʾ* (who are identified as the twelve men of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj with

whom Muḥammad made his secret pact at ʿAqaba), it is possible that the chapter is also meant to celebrate the man's personal *naqīb* who introduced him to the religion.

Edward Salisbury gives another explanation for this code. He writes that the sixteen periods of wandering refer to the sixteen cycles of confusion that humanity experienced before the true teaching was revealed. These include the three times that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib appeared to the shadows in the pre-material world (as an old man, a young man with a curled mustache riding a lion, and a small child), the seven pre-Adamite cycles (al-Ḥinn, al-Binn, al-Ṭimm, al-Rimm, al-Jānn, al-Jinn, and al-Yūnān) and finally the six pre-Muḥammadan cycles before the appearance of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[566]

At the third stage the men ask the stranger, "if your uncle is thirsty from where would you give him to drink?" to which he must respond, "from the *ʿayn al-ʿalawiyya.*" This answer, which literally means 'from the ʿAlid fountain, is actually a pun that further reveals the man's familiarity with the *Dustūr.* By reading *ʿayn* as a letter, as in the *ʿayn* of the sacred word *ʿa-m-s*, the answer is actually the title of the ninth chapter of the *Dustūr*, *al-ʿayn al-ʿalawiyya*, which discusses the different manifestations of the *ʿayn*, *mīm*, and *sīn* throughout history. Of course, according to its literal interpretation, the man's response can also be understood as an allusion to the *ʿabd al-nūr* in which ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is believed to be incarnate.

The fourth question is one that I have not been able to decipher. In Arabic it appears as: **ان غاط عمك فماذا تهديه الجواب لحية معاوية**. Edward Salisbury translates it as: "should your uncle's feet sink into the sand whither wouldst though direct him? The answer to which is: to the serpent of Muʿāwiya."[567] Salisbury explains that the snake of Muʿawiya is ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib who was the

[566] Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit," 296.

[567] Ibid., 297.

metaphorical ‘biter of the heel’ of Muʿāwiya. However, the reference seems terribly obscure and although there are stories in which ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib makes use of snakes,[568] none of these have anything to do with Muʿāwiyya.

I wonder if perhaps the question should instead be translated as “if your uncle voids himself, what would you give him? Ans. The beard of Muʿāwiya.” Although the grammatical form of the word غاط would have to be altered to تغوّط, the tenor of this interpretation would fit with the contemptuous manner with which the sect discusses the opponents of ʿAlī. Unfortunately, the closest corroboration I have so far found for such an insult is in the context of *ghasl al-janaba*, washing after impurities, which is esoterically interpreted as dissociation from Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān who are compared to excrement, urine, and gas respectively.[569] However this insult is somewhat different and so for the time being both my and Salisbury’s translation are mere speculation. The real problem with both of our interpretations is that they do not conform to the style of most of the other codes that seem to make reference to the *Dustūr*.

The fifth question more obviously alludes to the *Dustūr* as it asks, “if your uncle is lost where will you meet him?’ to which the stranger must answer, “in the *nisba*.” This answer is obviously a reference to the fourth chapter of the *Dustūr* titled *al-nisba* in which every believer’s personal intellectual pedigree is inserted. The *nisba* chapter affirms the believer’s religious heritage so that he is never spiritually lost but is firmly established in a religious heritage that traces back to the founders of the sect.

At the sixth stage the man is asked several related questions which also derive from the *Dustūr*. The first includes a numerical code: “four and two fours and three and two and their sum

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[568] For example, there is a story told by ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb under the pejorative name al-Adlam to Salmān al-Fārisī in which ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib transforms his bow into a giant snake, (al-Juʿfī, *K. al-Haft*: 110).

[569] al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq*: 109.

twice over in your religion - where are they?" to which he must reply "in the *musāfira*". The equation in the question (4+4+4+3+2) +2(4+4+4+3+2) yields the number fifty-one and the *musāfira* is the name of the thirteenth chapter of the *Dustūr* that describes the fifty-one students of al-Khaṣībī. Having illustrated his understanding of the reference to al-Khaṣibī's students, the man is asked to "divide them," to which he responds: "seventeen Iraqis, seventeen Syrians, and seventeen of unknown origin." Then to say where they are found: "at the gates of the city of Ḥarrān" and finally to state what they do: "they take with justice and give with justice." This entire exchange is quoted directly from the *musāfira* chapter which reads: in the name of God and by God and by the mystery of the *sayyid* Abū 'Abd Allāh, the mystery of the shaykh and his chosen children (the *mukhtaṣṣūn*) who drink from the sea of *ʿa-m-s*. For they are fifty-one and among them are seventeen Iraqis, seventeen Syrians, and seventeen hidden ones [of unknown origin]. They are stationed at the gate of the city of Harrān, giving and taking justly."

The final exchange, found only in MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564, refers to the *sirr ʿa-m-s*: "What is the secret of secret[s]? [It is] *ʿa-m-s.* What is the *ʿayn* of *ʿa-m-s*? [It is] the *maʿnā.* What is the *mīm* of *ʿa-m-s*? It is the *ism,* namely, Muḥammad. What is the *sīn* of *ʿa-m-s*? It is the *bāb*, namely, Salmān al-Fārisī."

Conclusion

Towards a Theory of Secrecy and Initiation among the Nuṣayri-ʿAlawīs

Initiation is the process by which the Nuṣayrī novice is separated from his secular existence and, by accessing a religious secret, recreated as a member of the spiritual elite. Like the gestational models of initiation found in other cultures, this process is conceived of as a return to the womb, an embryonic gestation, and a spiritual rebirth.[570] The productivity of this analogy for the formation of the Nuṣayrī sectarian identity and for the success of their secret, which has effectively been kept for nearly a thousand years, emerges from the sexual metaphor Nuṣayrīs read into the process of initiation. By comparing the transmission of religious truths to sexual intercourse, Nuṣayrīs are able to structure the entrance to their community along lines of marriage, birth, and breastfeeding, so that coreligionists become wives, sons, and brothers instead of merely neighbors and friends. These relationships are seen as *ḥaqīqī* (real), more true than simple *ṭabīʿī* (natural) relationships.

The conscious redrawing of sociational lines is, according to Simmel, the most conspicuous feature of a secret society, which seeks to encompass all aspects of its members' lives by purposefully mimicking the relational structures of the outside world.[571] Competing loyalties, such as those of family and clan, cannot be allowed to threaten the secret, and so alternate lines must be drawn. As has been demonstrated in Chapter Two, the early Nuṣayrīs consciously enforced this restructuring by transposing all Islamic laws regulating marriage and birth onto the initiatory relationship, so that it is a person's sectarian identity that is given

[570] Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1958), 51-60.

[571] Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (1950), 362-3.

primary importance. The prohibitions of initiatory consanguinity that emerged from this reading were meant to combat the preexistent loyalties of its practitioners by preventing them from contracting initiatory bonds along natural familial lines.

However as Erickson points out in his study of secret societies in danger, the rigorous commitment to realigning the loyalties of its members generally does not survive when the secrecy of a society stems from the need to reduce risk rather than from the 'fun' of having a secret.[572] In other words, when secrecy becomes more about *taqiyya* than about *kitmān*, trust becomes increasingly important, and preexistent networks will then set the limits of the secret society. This is perhaps how we should understand the evolution of the Nuṣayrīs from an open secret society to a closed tribal community. We know that al-Ṭabarānī discusses the initiation of Jews and Christians in his *K. al-Ḥāwī*,[573] but that later Nuṣayrīs saw initiation as something reserved for the male children of two Nuṣayrī parents.[574] We moreover know that at various points in history, notably in the seventh/thirteenth century when the Iraqi emir al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī (d. 1240) migrated to Latakia with a large army in order to help the Nuṣayrīs with their various sectarian struggles, entire clans converted *en masse* to this religion.[575] This is obviously not how al-Ṭabarānī saw entrance to the sect, but the precarious position of the community required it.

The situation that resulted is this odd structure of a secret society formed along tribal lines. In order to maintain the exclusivity of the doctrines espoused by this society various

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[572] Bonnie H. Erickson, "Secret Societies and Social Structure," *Social Forces* 60, no. 1 (1981): 194-96.

[573] al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī*: 89-90.

[574] Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairīs*: 105; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*: 373; see also Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *The Plain of Saints and Prophets*: 91, where it is suggested that this restriction is not rigorously enforced in contemporary Cilicia.

[575] Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 51-6.

attempts were made to redefine its elitism. Thus we see the emergence of an *ʿāmma- khāṣṣa* distinction and the purposeful exclusion of women and children from the religious sphere. Initiation too evolved in this process taking on the additional character of a tribal maturity rite, theoretically open to all males of the sect. However, since its rituals were based on an ancient *qānūn*, initiation was able to preserve a purer vision of Nuṣayrī elitism than was perhaps present in the larger society. By separating the novice from his parents' home and forcing him to live and study with a shaykh for nine months, initiation sought to draw the novice's loyalties away from his family and into the secret society. However, considering the clannish structure of the sect, it is not surprising that the Nuṣayrī community has not maintained the strong centralization that characterized it in the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries, and has since fragmented into competing factions and local interest groups, each espousing their own interpretations of the religion.

Nevertheless, if the centralized nature of the sect was compromised by this development, its essential seclusion from the outside world (up to the nineteenth century) was not. In fact, this aspect of Nuṣayrism was likely strengthened by the integration of clans for it allowed members to live and interact with insiders for their entire lives. This situation may also explain why Nuṣayrīs living in remote villages increasingly abandoned Islamic precepts, despite the fact that their sources clearly demand a superficial observance. If there are no real outsiders around, there is no need to dissimulate. But one should not forget that antinomianism, even in its most theoretical form, is an essentially secluding stance. As Haselrigg points out, the isolation of a secret society from the outside world is often accompanied by a rejection of its norms.[576] In the Nuṣayrī case this can be seen most clearly in their insistence that fully initiated believers are

[576] Lawrence E. Hazelrigg, "A Reexamination of Simmel's "The Secret and the Secret Society": Nine Propositions," *Social Forces* 47, no. 3 (1969): 326.

freed (whether merely in principle or also in practice) from the laws of Islam. Such statements should not merely be understood through the aristocratic conceptions of the theologians who preached them, but also through their cohering and alienating functions. If transgressing the religious norms of Islamic society makes the members of the Nuṣayrī community feel special, it also binds them together in a sense of shame with regards to the outside world that prevents them from breaking the trust of the group.

If the libertine rites described in the appendix to this dissertation were actually practiced, they should be understood through this lens. Like an underground criminal ring that commits a shared illegal act in order to unite all members in the risk of exposure, Nuṣayrīs who purposefully disregard the taboos of the general society feed their vulnerability to the outside world, forcing them to trust their coreligionists in a way that other men need not. This is relevant both for large-scale transgressions such as guest prostitution or the orgiastic night, and smaller ones such as wine drinking during the initiation ceremonies. Having broken an Islamic precept, the novice must personally fear the censure and opprobrium that exposure would bring upon him.

The flip side of Hasellrigg's observation is that the more a secret society emphasizes universally valued ideas instead of a rejection of societal norms, the more open and unsecretive it becomes.[577] This proposition holds true whether or not the openness is intentional or merely accidental, as is the case among present-day Nuṣayrīs. By highlighting the similarities between their religion and Shiite and Sunni Islam, by adopting the name ʿAlawites, and by writing books in support of their claim to be orthodox, contemporary Nuṣayrīs have threatened their secret in an unprecedented fashion. Their loud protests against charges of heresy have inspired numerous

[577] Ibid., 329.

studies on the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion and probably also instigated the large-scale publication of their books by the Dār li-ajl al-Maʿrifa. Even the present study, which, outside these few remarks, does not venture to analyze the contemporary Nuṣayrī situation, directly results from the newfound openness caused by their claims to espouse universal Islamic ideals.

As anyone will know, the best way to keep a secret is to hide the fact that one exists. This is why in the past Nuṣayrīs were taught to blend into the outside environment when venturing out of their homes, so that even coreligionists would not be able to identify them without secret signs of recognition. This type of masking prevented outsiders from breaching the boundaries of their secret, or even from knowing of its existence. For once this secret becomes generally known the proverbial cat is out of the bag and there is no accounting for how much havoc it can wreak.

Hinting at the existence of a secret inevitably sparks a person's curiosity, which is of course why it is used so effectively throughout the initiation process. By telling the novice that he will learn a great and arduous secret, by giving him mystifying glimpses into doctrines and rituals he does not yet understand, the initiating shaykh whets the appetite of the novice so that he is eager to dedicate himself to his studies. But this is obviously only desirable when one wants to expose a secret and not when one is trying to hide it. For such an end total silence is far preferable.

Teaching the novice to observe this silence is an essential feature of initiation and is likely why this process is so long and drawn out among the Nuṣayrīs. As Simmel and Hazalrigg have pointed out, the partially indoctrinated are always a major point of vulnerability to a secret society.[578] Initiatory stages therefore allow for the early termination of the education of any novice who is thought to threaten the secret. They also ensure that untried members do not have

578 Simmel, *Sociology*: 366-7; Hazelrigg, "Nine Propositions," 325.

sufficient information to do real harm if they succumb to the temptations of betrayal. These temptations are always most powerful when one first hears a secret, and particularly so, when the people from whom the secret must be kept are mothers, younger siblings, and close male friends. Therefore access to the secret in the Nuṣayrī community, and permission to talk about it, is given gradually to allow the novice to become accustomed to carrying its weight. For nine months the novice only learns a little of the truth and is only allowed to discuss it with his teacher. But once he has proven his self-restraint he graduates to a level of greater access and is given permission to discuss the secret with other initiated members of the sect.

Another function of the initiatory stages is to impress upon the novice the hierarchical nature of the secret truth, which he will never fully understand. This hierarchicalization is much steeper for Nuṣayrīs in the theological sense than it is in their day-to-day existence, but the stages of initiation impress this hierarchy on the novice from his first introduction to the religion. As Fontaine has stressed, initiands are often deliberately made to feel ignorant or confused to underline their inferiority and establish their respect for the hierarchy, which is essential for the preservation of the secret.[579]

Before concluding these preliminary remarks on the function of secrecy and initiation among the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, a few words should be said about the theoretical structure of Nuṣayrī initiation. As mentioned above, this process conforms to the gestational model of initiation, which is a variant of Eliade's more common pattern of initiatory death and spiritual resurrection.[580] In the Nuṣayrī case, the return to the womb can actually also be understood as a

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[579] J. S. La Fontaine, *Initiation*, Themes in Social Anthropologie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

[580] Eliade, *Initiation*: 51-60.

symbolic death. In his marriage to the shaykh, the novice is thought to die to his adolescent male existence and to become a woman, a lower level on the reincarnational scale.

His adoption of female characteristics in this stage also fits quite well with Bettelheim's understanding of the genital mutilations that often accompany the initiatory rituals of primitive societies. Bettelheim claims that these 'symbolic wounds' betray an envy of the opposite sex and a desire to acquire their attributes through initiation.[581] While there are no physical mutilations in the Nuṣayrī process, this way of thinking is helpful for understanding the novice's symbolic metamorphosis into a wife during the marital stage (and the shaykh's symbolic transformation into a nursing mother during the breastfeeding stage). By symbolically changing into women these men adopt the most admirable feminine traits of receptivity, obedience, productivity, compassion, and nourishment without ever actually losing their superior male dignity. Of course, in the case of the novice the female status is also a sign of humility and submission, and not actually an enviable state. Nevertheless the feminine traits he acquires in this role are exactly those thought to be most conducive to learning the secret.

Also productive for understanding the structure of Nuṣayrī initiation is van Gennep's tripartite theory of rites of passage. According to his schema, initiatory rites, like other life-crises ceremonies, can be divided into three distinct stages: those of separation, transition, and incorporation.[582] This schema pans out on both the meta- and micro-levels of Nuṣayrī initiation. On the meta-level, one can clearly see that the marital phase of Nusayri initiation is a period of separation. In this stage the novice is removed from the world of women, taken from his parental home, and cut off of his former identity. He is isolated for nine months with a stranger, is treated

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[581] Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1954).

[582] Ardold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 65-115.

as a woman, and is forbidden to associate with the greater society. His gestation (which technically occurs at the same time) is a transitional stage in which his new identity is gradually formed. Finally, his birth and breastfeeding phases are incorporational stages in which his new spiritual identity is reintroduced to the society.

On the micro-level of the individual ceremonies, the various rites and postures of initiation can also be understood through this schema. Washing, burning incense, assuming submissional stances such as bowing or placing sandals on the head, reciting the *barāʾa*: these are all rites of separation from the novice's prior existence. Sermons, threats, and oaths, are all transitional rites that move the novice along to his eventual reintegration, which is marked by unveiling, laying on of hands, sharing *ʿabd al-nūr*, praying together with the community, and other obviously incorporational rites. Of course, many of these rites may have dual functions, such as separational and transitional, or transitional and incorporational, but van Gennep's schema is nevertheless helpful for understanding the natural rhythms of these ceremonies, which are meant to transition a student from one state of spiritual existence to the next.

Plans for Future Research:

In developing this dissertation into a book, I hope to expand on various areas of investigation that are not covered in this study. First of all, I'd like to explore the post-initiation education of the Nuṣayrī novice, about which more must certainly be said. It is clear that this is when the novice gains access to the *bāṭinī* texts studied in this dissertation, but we need to know more about this process and about how one climbs the communal ranks to become a shaykh, naqīb, or imam.

I would also like to explore female participation in the religion. As has been continually stressed throughout this study, Nuṣayrī women are excluded from initiation. This is quite serious

from a theological perspective, as it means that they can never gain access to the secret knowledge necessary for salvation. The misogyny behind this doctrine is deeply rooted in Nuṣayrī thought. However, I have come across scattered comments that indicate that women were not always excluded. I hope to collect these statements and those to the contrary in order to discern why and when this marginalization occurred. I will also ask if there were alternative religiosities observed by women and if there has been any egalitarian development since the advent of modernity.

Obviously, if the possibility of field research becomes available, I hope to be able to explore how initiation works in practice on the ground. Some questions I would like answered include: Are all men are initiated or do some opt out? What social obligations are actually imposed by the bonds of initiation? What practical measures does the community take to enforce the secret? How have modernity, urbanization, and widespread education changed the role of initiation in the construction of Nuṣayrī identity? While the current political situation in Syria precludes this type of research, it may be possible to interview ʿAlawites living abroad, or perhaps ʿAlawite communities in Lebanon, Turkey, or Israel, where members may be less reluctant to share information with outsiders.

Finally, I hope to expand on the theoretical analyses offered in this conclusion by reading more extensively in the literature on secrecy and initiation emerging from the fields of sociology, anthropology, and religious studies. I also intend to familiarize myself with the initiatory literature of several other Islamic groups living in Syria such as the Ismāʿīlīs, the Druze, and certain Sufi orders in order to see if there are productive comparisons to be made.

The two manuscripts I discovered and employ in my dissertation are both extremely important texts for my field. An article about my rediscovery of Lyde's manual for shaykhs is

forthcoming in *JRAS*. I also plan to submit an article for review describing the second manuscript, which I believe will have an even greater impact on my field. In the upcoming years, I intend to produce annotated translations of both of these works, so that they can become accessible to a larger readership interested in Islamic heterodoxy.

Part III: Appendix

Ritual Libertinism According to MS Taymūr, *ʿAqāʾid* 564

Charges of sexual deviance, including sodomy, wife sharing, incest, and the orgiastic night have dogged the Nuṣayrīs from their earliest history. As similar allegations can be found in the heresiographical treatises of many cultures,[583] most scholars of Islamic heterodoxy have dismissed these types of accusations as mere polemical slander.[584] While this may be the case in many instances, it is important not to discount these reports simply because of their polemical packaging. The heresiographical accounts can often preserve actual sectarian customs that were merely misunderstood or misrepresented by the orthodox establishment. For example, as has been demonstrated in Chapter Two, the charge of homosexuality that al-Nawbakhtī leveled against the Nuṣayrīs was likely based on a misconstrual of their initiation ceremonies, which were conducted as symbolic marriages between men. Since the Nuṣayrīs vehemently opposed homosexuality it is unlikely that the heresiographical accounts also preserve memory of an actual sodomizing rite. Nevertheless one cannot assume that a charge is libelous simply because it is shocking. Sexual behavior in the pre-modern Islamic world was far more diverse than it is today and it is important not to impose current morality (or even the morality of the Medieval Islamic theologians) on the Muslim sects.

In her forthcoming book *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, Crone demonstrates how several of the charges leveled against the heterodox sects contain kernels of truth that were distorted and sensationalized by the Islamic theologians. For example, she shows how the accusations of sexual communism ubiquitously associated with the Khurramites reflect a rural

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[583] S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 54-78.

[584] See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīʿa become Sectarian?," *JAOS* 75, no. 1 (1955): 7; R.P. Buckley, "The Early Shiite Ghulāh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* XLII, no. 2 (1997): 314; William F. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians,* 114; Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran,* 140.

Iranian custom whereby brothers held wives and property in common.[585] Like European primogeniture, this practice ensured that land would not be subdivided among numerous heirs. This type of fraternal polyandry was by no means the libertine free for all described by the heresiographers, but simply a practice that testifies to an alternate sexual morality that time and Islamic conformity have eliminated.

Of course, it is not fair to whitewash all of the charges. It is certainly possible that some of the sexual rites described in the heresiographies were actually practiced, and precisely for their transgressive value. As antinomians the Nuṣayrīs considered themselves above the ritual obligations of Islam.[586] That this belief translated into complete libertinism is unlikely. It is hard to imagine a sect surviving for over a millennium without sexual regulations, and enough evidence exists that would contradict this assumption. Nevertheless the ideological groundwork for a certain libertinism is present and may even have been instantiated by antinomian factions in the sect, as will be shown in what follows.

The newly discovered manual, MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564, introduced in Chapter Three, appears to have belonged to such a group. Written in Hama in 1306/1889, it is a manual for Nuṣayrī novices that contains explicit instruction for the rites of guest prostitution and the orgiastic night. It also includes chapters encouraging communalism of wives and promoting incest as a sacred practice.

Since this is the only Nuṣayrī text, and actually the first text of any Islamic sect, explicitly to confirm the heresiographical reports, a certain suspicion is in order. Could this manuscript be a travesty written by an enemy of the sect? My initial impression is that it is authentic. Only a

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[585] Patricia Crone, *Nativist Prophets*: 391-438.

[586] See discussion Ch 4.

small percentage of the work is dedicated to these rites. The rest of the manual includes practices and prayers that can be confirmed from other sources. Moreover, the libertine sections do not read like a forgery; the author provides dissenting legal opinions regarding who must observe the rites, includes cautionary tales to discourage non-compliance, and even offers mundane suggestions that would hardly feature in a polemical treatise. The manual reads as though it were written to educate a Nuṣayrī audience, and not as a counterfeit exposé for the masses.

However, considering the late authorship of the text, it is difficult to determine whether the libertine rituals described in it are ancient Nuṣayrī customs or merely modern appropriations of heresiographical motifs. It is possible that after so many centuries of being accused of these practices some Nuṣayrīs embraced them as a matter of pride, along the lines of the 'Black is Beautiful' movement. The awareness that the author of this manuscript betrays of heresiograpical terminology suggests that he was, at the very least, familiar with the heresiographical discourse. In preparation for a more in-depth study of this manuscript, I have collected some of what we know about these rites from other sources. I have also included a transcription and translation of the relevant portions of the text at the end of this appendix.

The Rite of Guest Prostitution

In MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564 the rite of guest prostitution, i.e. offering one's wife to visiting shaykhs, is called *al-farḍ al-lāzim wa-l-ḥaqq al-wājib*, meaning ' the imperative and obligatory duty.' The Taymūriyya manuscript is not the first nineteenth century text to speak of this practice among the Nuṣayrīs. The Nuṣayrī apostate Sulaymān al-Adhanī wrote about it, using this same designation, some thirty years earlier in his *K. al-Bākūra*. As mentioned in

Chapter Three, al-Adhanī claims to have experienced this custom first-hand while visiting the home of a Kalāzī shaykh in the village of Wadī Jarb on his way to Antakya in Turkey. He writes:[587]

> I encountered a shaykh from the elite and he invited me to stay with him. When night fell they made a bed for me in an empty room. It was close to two o'clock when suddenly there was someone knocking on the door so I opened it and lo a woman entered, locked the door, and lay down beside me. She startled me, as I did not know her intention. After a bit she began to speak to me and said, 'Do you not accept 'the imperative and obligatory duty (*al-farḍ al-lāzim wa-l-ḥaqq al-wājib*)?' Suddenly the words of the imam and guide [who had previously mentioned a rite by this name] came to my mind and I realized that the 'imperative and obligatory duty' is offering their women to each other.

Al-Adhanī continues to explain that this experience is exactly what made him break with the Nuṣayrī religion altogether, as he realized that he would be obliged to share his own wife in this same manner.

In light of his polemical agenda throughout the *K. al-Bākūra*, modern scholarship has generally dismissed al-Adhanī's account as so much slander.[588] However, since he took the pains to describe the Kalāzian rationale for this practice, his report deserves serious consideration. He explains:[589]

> According to the Kalāzī sect it is 'an imperative and obligatory duty' that if an imam of theirs visits another imam who is his equal, the second is required to present his wife to the first. They call this practice, as mentioned above, an imperative and obligatory duty (*farḍ lāzim wa-haqq wājib*) and they rule that the one who opposes it does not enter heaven. The masses (*ʿāmma*) [of the sect] do not know about this. They adduce from the Quran, *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, proof for this corruption, from where it says (Q33: 50), 'any believing woman who offers herself freely to the Prophet and whom the Prophet might be willing to wed: This is a privilege for you, and not for other believers.' They interpret this verse by saying

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[587] al-Adhanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra*, 93-4; trans. in Salisbury, "Sulayman's First Ripe Fruit": 285.

[588] Bar-Asher and Kofsky note that al-Adhanī's account echoes a Nuṣayrī polemic against the Druze preserved and refuted in the eleventh century Druze *Rasāʾil al-ḥikma*. See Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, "A Druze-Nuṣayrī Debate in the "Epistles of Wisdom," in *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*, 154-9.

[589] al-Adhanī, *K. al-Bākūra*: 59.

> that prophets don't marry (*maʿṣūm ʿan al-zawāj*) and therefore this verse is directed to us. Thus the prophet that is mentioned [in the verse] is the imam, i.e. the elite guide (*al-murshid al-khāṣṣ*) and the 'believing woman' is the wife of any elite imam. Mention of this obligation appears in the *K. al-Dalāʾil bi-maʿrifat al-masāʾil* of Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī which [in turn] references the *K. al-Haft* whose authorship they attribute to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, from the 'ten rules' that are found it. The tenth rule is 'the imperative and obligatory duty' on every believer to gratify his fellow believer as he gratifies himself. They understand from this presenting their wives to their elite. Mention of this also appears in *K. al-Taʾyīd*. As for the Northerners [al-Adhanī's clan], they interpret this as granting knowledge and money [to the traveling imam].

Of the three references that al-Adhanī cites for this practice, the only one I have been able to verify, and only partially, is al-Ṭabarānī's *K. al-Dalāʾil*, in which there is in fact mention of a *"haqq allāh al-wājib*" with regards to satisfying the needs of traveling believers. However, there is no indication that this might extend to sharing wives. Al-Ṭabarānī writes, "Whoever fulfills God's obligatory duty (*haqq allāh al-wājib*), what remains for him to do? It remains for him to greet his brothers to satisfy their needs."[590]

It is possible, as al-Adhanī claims, that some Nuṣayrīs understood this obligation to extend to sharing their wives with traveling shaykhs. However, this is probably not an interpretation that al-Ṭabarānī would have endorsed, for in the *K. al-Ḥāwī* he seems to imply that such a practice is deeply immoral. Regarding the duties of initiates to their brethren he writes that believers can enter each other's homes, even uninvited, and freely dispose of their 'circumstances' (*aḥwāl*).[591] This phrasing sounds very like communism although he clarifies that it refers to employing wives of other believers to wash clothes and prepare food. He explains that by carrying out these domestic responsibilities a woman can ascend in her reincarnations and

[590] al-Ṭabarānī, *K. al-Dalā'il*: 118.

[591] Idem, *K. al-Ḥāwī*: 98-9. Al-Ṭabarānī does not provide a proof text for the law that believers can enter each other's homes. But could it be related to Q24: 29 "there is no sin for you to enter uninhabited houses wherein is comfort for you"?

return as a man in her next life, so that she can finally merit salvation. As if to specifically refute the idea of sexual communism al-Ṭabaranī immediately states that anyone who fornicates with the wife of a believer will be forced to return through *maskh* (degrading reincarnations). It seems from this that the practice of guest prostitution did exist in the early years of the sect but that al-Ṭabaranī opposed it.

Although many centuries divide al-Ṭabarānī's writing in the eleventh century from the two texts that describe the *farḍ al-lāzim wa-l-haqq al-wājib* in the nineteenth, it seems reasonable to assume that certain factions of the sect did indeed engage in guest prostitution as a religious rite. [592] The fact that this practice was limited to coreligionists leads one to believe that its function was to instill a sense of brotherhood and unity among practitioners, and to show respect to fellow initiates traveling far from home.

Incest and the Orgiastic Night

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the idea that Nuṣayrīs engaged in an orgiastic night was even more prevalent than rumors of guest prostitution. It was discussed, with varying levels of credulity, by Niebuhr, [593] Volney,[594] Burckhardt,[595] Condor,[596] Taylor,[597] von

[592] There is also a nineteenth century report of an American traveler who writes, "[the Nosairieh] are not immoral, so the Missionaries assert, except that they sell their daughters to the Turks as slaves; and that their religious heads or sheikhs are privileged to cohabit with any woman, married or unmarried, and the husbands even urge the sheikhs to honor them by the selection of their wives," (see John P. Peters, *Nippur or Explorations and Adventures on the Euphrates* (New York, London: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1897), II: 12.) This statement is later than al-Adhanī's, so it is difficult to know if it is an entirely distinct account. For more on this rite in other Middle Eastern communities see J. Chelhod, "Du nouveau à propos du 'matriarcat' arabe," 28, no. 1 (1981): 82; G. J. H. Van Gelder, *Close Relationships: Incest and Inbreeading in Classical Arabic Literature* (London Tauris & Co., 2005), 19-21; Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Regional Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 427-33.

[593] Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisen durch Syrien und Palästina* (Copenhagen1778), II: 357.

[594] M.C.F. Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785* (London: G. Robinson, 1805), II: 5-6.

Hammer,[598] Silvestre de Sacy,[599] De Nerval,[600] Walpole,[601] Lyde,[602] and Dussaud.[603] The idea was so widely attested that it inspired the free-love doctrines of the nineteenth century Black American Rosicrucian, Paschal Beverly Randolph, who claimed to model his 'sex magic' rituals on the Nuṣayrīs.[604] However, unlike the charge of guest prostitution, the orgiastic night is not discussed or even alluded to in any available Nuṣayrī text other than MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564. Nor is it mentioned by al-Adhanī, who would certainly have included such damning information in his *K. al-Bākūra*, had it been available to him.

The Orientalists who described this rite mentioned two details that are also found in the Taymūriyya manuscript. These are that the practitioners would extinguish the lights at the commencement of the ceremony and that they would engage in intercourse without regard to kin or consanguinity.[605] Obviously these two ideas are related, as it is difficult to discriminate

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595 John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: J. Murray, 1822), 152. (Although here reported of the Ismāʿīlīs in the area.)

596 Josiah Conder, *Syria and Asia Minor*, The Modern Traveller (London: Duncan, 1824), 266-68.

597 W. C. Taylor, *The History of Mohammedanism, and its sects* (London: John W Parker, 1834), 202.

598 Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *The history of the Assassins: derived from oriental sources*, trans. Oswald Charles Wood (London: Smith and Elder, Cornhill, 1835), 214-15.

599 Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des druzes,* (1838), 574-5.

600 Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient. 1848-5*, Oeuvres (Paris n.d.; reprint, Oeuvres), X:414.

601 F. Walpole, *The Ansarii and the Assassins, with travels in the Further East, in 1850-51, including a Visit to Nineveh* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851), III:334.

602 Lyde, *Asian Mystery* (1860): 102-9.

603 Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairīs*: 153-60.

604 John Patrick Deveney, "The Coming of the Nusa'iri," in *Paschal Beverly Randolph: a Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician*, *SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 211-40.

605 Perhaps the best example is von Hammer who wrote, concerning the Nuṣayrīs, Druze, and Ismāʿīlīs, "All these still existing sects are designated by the Moslimin generally, Sindike (*freethinkers*), Mulhad (*impious*), and Batheni (*esoterics*), and on account of their nocturnal assemblies, sometimes the one, sometimes the other, receive from the

between sexual partners in the dark. While this confirmation should theoretically support the authenticity of the manuscript, it is actually its most suspicious feature. Most heresiographical attestations of the orgiastic night include these same motifs, which lead one to believe that these are merely tropes rather than accurate descriptions of sectarian practice.[606] In fact, it is for this very reason that Crone discounts the orgiastic night as a polemical fantasy, despite her acceptance of real practices behind most other sexual rites described in the heresiographies.[607]

Yet, the inclusion of these details in the Taymūriyya manuscript need not detract from its credibility. The antiquity and prevalence of these ideas may reasonably have inspired the author of the ceremony to introduce them in his own version of the rite. Just as a modern dabbler in the occult might have certain ideas, impressed by countless images and literary references, of how to conduct a séance (for example, he might use candles, hold hands, and chant an invitation to the deceased), an organizer of an orgy might adopt those features he knows belong in such a ceremony.

Moreover, while the Taymūriyya manuscript does repeat these tropes, it does not do so in the same clichéd fashion found in the other texts. For example, incestuous copulation in MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564 is portrayed as the objective of the ceremony, and not simply an inevitable outcome of the darkness. Only family members are invited to the orgy, for as the author explains,

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Turks the name of *Mumsoindiren*, or the *extinguishers* [in Ottoman], because, according to the accusations of their religious adversaries, they extinguish the lights, for the purpose of indulging in promiscuous intercourse, without regard to kindred or sex." (Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Assassins*: 213-14.)

[606] In the Islamic heresiographical literature it was first attested by al-Baghdādī against the Khurramite Bābakiyya (al-Baghdādī, *K. al-Farq*: 252), but the charge is nearly a thousand years older, and was leveled by the Pagans against the Early Christians, [Theophilus of Antioch (Ad Autolycum) Tatian (Oratio ad Graecos)] and by the Church fathers against the Gnostics,[Clement of Alexandria (Stromateis), Minucius Felix (Octavius 9), Origen (Contra Celsum 6.27), and Epiphanius (Panarion 26:4-5)] before the Muslim theologians turned it on the *ghulāt.*

[607] Crone, *Nativist Prophets*: 435-38.

the goal of the ceremony is to demonstrate the permissibility of close kin marriages, which are only publically avoided for purposes of *taqiyya.*

Now, as any student of Islamic heresiology will know, charges of incest are just as common as those of wife sharing and the orgiastic night. Accurate or not, these accusations were meant to portray the heterodox sects as a crypto-Zoroastrians. It was well known to the Islamic theologians that Zoroastrians used to practice close-kin marriages, called *khwēdōdah*.[608] Although the practice was eventually abolished among mainstream Zoroastrians, it is certainly possible that some Neo-Zoroastrian groups revived it in opposition to Islam. Is this feature of the ceremony then a relic of *khwēdōdah*, or merely a deliberate incorporation of yet another heresiological motif? In other words, could this practice have survived among the Nuṣayrīs from the days when close kin marriages were common, or should we understand this element of the ceremony as the author's attempt to neutralize the heresiographical accusations of incest by portraying the practice as an ancient and respectable rite?

The second trope, that of extinguishing the lights, is also portrayed in a neo-Zoroastrian fashion. The author of the manuscript instructs the shaykh conducting the ceremony to recite a prayer celebrating God as light and then to extinguish the lamp without using his breath. Both of these elements are well known Zoroastrian ideas: Ahura Mazda, the Zoroastrian God of light, is worshipped through fire, and so to this day priests serving in fire-temples wear masks (called

[608] Van Gelder, *Close Relationships*: 36-78; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Shahrbānū, Lady of the Land of Iran and Mother of the Imams: Between Pre-Islamic Iran and Imami Shiʿism " in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris and The Institute for Ismaili Studies, 2011), 57-8. For a description of the practice in ancient Iran see E. W. West, "The meaning of the *khvētūk-das* or *Khvētūtād*', in *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. M. Muller, vol. XVIII, *Pahlavi Texts*, Part II: *The Dādistān-I Dinik and the Epistles of Manuchikar* (Oxford, 1882), Appendix 3; J.S. Slotkin, 'On a Possible Lack of Incest regulations in Old Iran', *American Anthropologist*, 49 (1947), pp. 612-7; W. H. Goodenough, 'Comments on the Question of Incestuous Marriages in Old Iran', *Amercan Anthropologist*, 51 (1949), 326-8; B. Spooner, 'Iranian Kinship and Marriage' *Iran*, 4 (1966), pp.51-9; C, Herrenschmidt, "Note sur la parenté chez les Perses au début de l'empire achéménide", in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Achaemenid History* II 53-67; idem, "Le *xwētōdas* ou marriage 'incestueux" en Iran ancient", in P. Bonte (ed.) *Epouser au plus proche. Inceste, prohibitions et strategies matrimonials autour de la Méditerranée* (Paris, 1994), 113-125.

padān), so as not to pollute the fire with their breath.[609] It is clear that the Islamic theologians were aware of this aspect of Zoroastrian religion for al-Bīrūnī reports that the Zoroastrian Mahdī who ruled in Qarmaṭī Bahrain in 319/931 forbade people to put out fire with their breath, threatening to cut out the tongue of any man who did so.[610] While it is certainly true that many Zoroastrian elements are preserved in the syncretistic religious system of the Nuṣayrīs,[611] the stacking of these three elements of incest, God as light, and the prohibition of breathing on fire, seems to be a particularly deliberate association of Zoroastrian motifs with the orgiastic night. This endeavor is certainly unique and is not echoed in any of the other sources.

What did the nineteenth century orientalists think was the purpose of this rite? Those few who sought to explain it as anything more than hedonistic debauchery tended to appeal to notions of spiritual transcendence, mystical union, and the Hieros gamos. Silvestre de Sacy, citing the *R. al-Dāmigha li-l-fāsiq* (Epistle crushing the heretic), a Druze anti-Nuṣayrī polemic attributed to Ḥamza b. ʿAlī (d. after 411/1021), explained that Nuṣayrīs considered spiritual union (*nikāḥ al-bāṭin*) to be incomplete without carnal union (*nikāḥ al-ẓāhir*).[612] Volney, Burckhardt, and Walpole related the orgiastic night to veneration of the female genitalia, a notion, which, according to Bar-Asher and Kofsky, is still prevalent in Syria today, where

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[609] Bausani, *Religion in Iran*: 60.

[610] Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *al-Athār al-bāqiya ʿan al-qurūn al-khāliya*, ed. Parviz Aẓkāei (Teheran: Mirāsh-e Maktub, 2001), 260. (213 =196 in the Sachau edition). For more details of this event see Heinz Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, trans. Michael Bonner, Handbuch der Orientalistik (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 257. I'd like to credit Crone for directing me to this source.

[611] Meir Michael Bar-Asher, "The Iranian Component of the Nuṣayrī Religion," *Iran* 41(2003): 217-27; Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*: 230-3.

[612] Silvestre De Sacy, *Exposé*: II: 573-74. The entire polemic can be found in D. De Smet, *Les Épîtres Sacrées Des Druzes: Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma Volumes 1 et 2* (Leuven - Paris - Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 602-13, translation in 303-17. It has recently been studied in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, "A Druze-Nuṣayrī Debate," 153-61.

Nuṣayrīs are derogatively dubbed *ʿubbād al-farj* (worshippers of the female genitalia).[613] Considering the deeply rooted misogyny of the sect, this idea seems unlikely. More probable is the statement found in the same *R. al-Dāmigha* that Nuṣayrīs consider the vulva to symbolize disbelief, so that intercourse is actually a militant representation of the subjugation of falsehood.[614] However, this idea is equally unconfirmed in the available Nuṣayrī texts, and no spiritual significance seems to be attached to the sexual act in Nuṣayrism except as a symbol in the context of initiation.

As for the Taymūriyya manuscript, the function of the ceremony is explicitly trangressive. It is described as a deliberate demonstration of their essential antinomianism. The author stresses the fact that although they must generally conform to their Islamic surroundings, they are actually above the law, and must commemorate this freedom with a 'night of libertinism' (*laylat al-ibāḥa*). This celebration is also called a 'night of the great worship' (*laylat al-ʿibāda al-ʿuẓmā*) and a 'night of correct remembrance' (*laylat al-tadhkār al-ṣaḥīḥ*), in that it reminds believers that the laws of Islam, and particularly those relating to consanguinity, do not actually apply to them.

The author also rationalizes the ceremony with a second mundane and probably idiosyncratic concern over demographics. At several points in the manual he reiterates the principle that anything that increases the population of the *milla* (religious community) is permitted. With regards to the orgy he says that any resulting progeny is legitimate, even though it is the product of incest, because any action that adds to the numbers of the sect is allowed.

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[613] Idem, "A Druze-Nuṣayrī Debate," 157.

[614] "For the female genitalia are like the imams of disbelief, and when the penis enters the genitalia of the woman, it represents the esoteric, and it symbolizes the defeat of the people of the exoteric and the imams of disbelief." De Smet, *Épîtres Sacrées*: 605-6.)

One wonders what the situation on the ground might have looked like to make him so concerned with demographics.

Other Related Concerns

Also transcribed and translated below is a long chapter entitled *sūrat al-nisāʾ* (the chapter on women), which is structured as something of a commentary on the Quranic chapter of this name. It is included here because of its many references to communism and repeated instructions for women to make themselves available to their male coreligionists, regardless of consanguinity. To my knowledge it is the only currently available Nuṣayrī text directed to women, and seems to present a more favorable view of the female sex than found in other sources.

Translation of MS Taymūr *ʿAqāʾid* 564

A Note about the Transcription and Translation

MS Taymūr *Aqāʾid* 564 is written in Middle Arabic and I have left the colloquialisms and grammatical mistakes as I found them. Additionally, in quoting Quran and Ḥadīth the author often misquotes or vocalizes incorrectly. I have also left these errors intact, as I believe they are important for understanding the author's level of education and familiarity with Islamic discourse.

Excerpts on Guest Prostitution

[17] They made our laws and ordinances as a test for our sect and [a way in which we can show?] our love for one another. They warned us that we should deem "the gains of this worldly life" (Q4: 94) as though they are nothing and [share them?] with your brother. If your Nuṣayrī brother comes to you, give him to eat and drink and treat him with respect. [18] Do not give preference to yourself over him in anything. If he is one of the shaykhs, chiefs (*naqīb*), or nobles (*najīb*), then rush to perform the 'imperative and obligatory duty' (*al-farḍ al-lāzim wa-l-ḥaqq al-wājib*). Take care not to withhold it from him for if you do, you will have fallen short in the religion and it will be as though you are of the unbelievers who are outside of our holy sect. So present your wife to him, or your sister, or your mother, or your daughter, so that he can enjoy her for as long as he is with you. For the gains of this worldly life among the Nuṣayriyya are shared among them.

Some of our past shaykhs said that the 'imperative and obligatory duty' is not required of the religiously elevated. Rather, it is for the lowly [to offer] to the high. However the

consensusamong us is that it is compulsory for every Nuṣayrī to his Nuṣayrī brother, be he of the high or low among them. However, the majority of the initiates (*ʿuqqāl*) do not hold this to be true except with other initiates like them. If one of the uninitiated (*juhhāl*) stayed as a guest of one of the initiated, it would not permissible for [the initiate] to present the 'imperative and obligated duty' [to his uninitiated visitor], rather the opposite. Likewise if one of the initiates visits another of his own rank, it is enjoined upon him.

[19] Question: What is the meaning of God's saying, (Q17: 32), 'Do not commit adultery for, behold, it is an abomination and a great sin'?

Answer: Our master said in his appearance as the *ism* Mūsā (Exodus 20:17),'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.' This desire is envy, malice, and turbidity. A Nuṣayrī cannot do it without the knowledge of his fellow Nuṣayrī. But if it is as an acceptance of the 'imperative and obligated duty,' then it is not adultery. And if a woman gives herself to you willingly then she is acting with purity for the sake of God.

Question: Is intercourse between a Nuṣayrī male and a non-Nuṣayrī female considered fornication?

Answer: God Forbid! Even though she isn't a Nuṣayrī, she is nothing more than a type of animal. This is not counted as unlawful fornication, rather he is rewarded for it, for if he impregnates her and she bears a child from him he will have increased the number of Nuṣayrīs, for her child will no doubt become Nuṣayrī when he grows up. As for a female Nuṣayrī, if she fornicates with a non-Nuṣayrī, that is [what is considered] unlawful fornication.

[Margin:] However, some of our pious shaykhs object to this and narrate *ḥadīths* with correct chains of transmission on the authority of Ibn Hamdān al-Khaṣībī that if a female Nuṣayrī fornicates with a non-Nuṣayrī, but she did it out of desire for a child and not out of sexual desire,

then she is not a fornicator. Likewise if she sees some benefit in handing herself over to a non-Nuṣayrī that will accrue to the sons of the sect, then she is not a fornicator, rather she is rewarded for this in the cycles of her reincarnations. […]

[20] Our shaykh and master Ibn Hamdān al-Khaṣībī said, according to what the one who heard from him narrated, that if one of the initiates (*ʿuqqāl*) comes to you, say, 'Peace be upon you, our master, guide, shaykh, protector, and supporter.' Then present him everything you can of the obligations of hospitality and do not hold back anything that is in your power to give. For this is required of you. So present him the 'imperative and obligated duty.' It is upon you to [present it with] a good nature and an easy temperament and it is upon the initiate to accept it with an open heart and to invoke blessing upon the people of the house, may goodness be upon them, God willing.

One of the uninitiated Nuṣayrīs had a very beautiful wife whom he loved very much. When one of the initiates visited him, he honored him as should and didn't leave out any means for enjoyment, rather he did them all for him. Except [with respect to] his wife, he acted with the behavior of the unbelievers and prevented her from performing the 'imperative and obligatory duty.' Our master exacted vengeance on him and turned him and his wife into two pigs, male and female. One of the unbelieving Christians bought them and they were punished in this degrading reincarnation for many years. Finally they became two stones in the door lintel of one of the Muslims.

Excerpts on the Orgiastic Night

[49] A Noble Deed

Nobody is allowed to participate in it except a Nuṣayrī by the secret of his belief in the mystery of *ʿayn mīm sīn* and by his worship of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. It is a secret and glad tiding that we transmit to our religious brethren from the rest of the believers in the powerful ʿAlī.

Know, my brethren, may the truth confirm you to the truth by adhering to the truth, that the laws are burdens and tests that I imposed as heavy encumbrances on the necks of the people of human shortcoming for their failing during the creation of humanity, for the strength of the influence of the satanic desires [over them], for their ignorance of the divine essence, and for their denial of the divine image that appears in the ʿAlawite form.

But we are the society of believers among the Nuṣayrī sect. For our affirmation of ʿAlī b. [50] Abī Ṭālib, the God, and the chain of twelve Imams that were sent for guidance, namely, al-Murtaḍā, al-Mujtabā, al-Shahīd, al-Sajjād, al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq, al-Kāẓim, al-Riḍā, al-Taqī, al-Naqī, al-Zakī, and al-Ḥujja / al-Qāʾim / al-Muntaẓar, we were freed of the fetters of the burdens. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib relieved us and commanded his apostle to inform us of this so he [Muḥammad] addressed us with His words, (Q5: 5) "Today all of the pleasant things are made lawful for you."[615] And His words, (Q7: 32) "Say, who is there to forbid the beauty of God." And His words (Q15: 42) "you have no power over them." For every pleasant thing is permissible to us, and everything beautiful is permissible to us, and the Laws have no power over us. We pray, not because it is commanded of us, but because it brings us near [to God]. Our hearts seek it to bring us close to our goal and the object of our desire. We marry, not by contract, and whoever believes that what occurs from the form of the marriage contract at a wedding is a required obligation is guilty of unbelief. Rather it is in compliance with the Satans who currently rule the land. For sexual intercourse for a Nuṣayrī is an effort to sow the seeds of offspring in the land for

[615] The Arabic is misquoted and incorrectly vocalized here.

the benefit of increasing the sons [51] of the sect. Any Nuṣayrī who admires land and wants to throw seed in it seeking a good crop, it isn't right to prevent his beneficial intention. Therefore it is not prohibited for us, as it is for others, to marry mothers, sisters, daughters, and the like. However we abstain in accordance with what the people of the sons of our generation agree upon. For this reason, and so that it should not take root in the minds over the long course of history that this abstention is an obligation that the Nuṣayrī was burdened with, our sages and shaykhs established a night of general libertinism (*laylat al-ibāḥa al-ʿāmma*). It is an exalted mystery, may God be pleased with those who implement it and reward those of our shaykhs who instructed us for good. They didn't leave us a door for doubt or forgetfulness. They said to us, according to what the trustworthy have narrated, 'you are the fellowship of Nuṣayrīs, you have become a small party in the midst of depraved unbelievers. You were required to keep up with their unbelief and falsehood. Since they prohibit the pleasant things for themselves, they obligate you with this [as well], wrongly and out of enmity.' Among these is the prohibition of marrying mothers, sisters, daughters, maternal aunts, and paternal aunts. This [prohibition] is one of the things that do not agree with the comfort [promised] to you in the religious and worldly realms, but you cannot openly oppose them. However, as a mercy to you, [52] and in preservation of your religion and the welfare of your faith, we establish for you that which will be merciful for you and prevent you from the denseness of the darkness of disbelief. Verily it is the night of libertinism (*laylat al-ibāḥa*), the night of the great worship (*laylat al-ʿibāda al-ʿuẓmā*), the night of correct remembrance (*laylat al-tadhkār al-ṣaḥīḥ*). Let every group of men and women gather, from one home or from several, of [immediate] family or relatives. Let them call one of the initiates (*ʿuqqāl*), purify, perfume, and adorn themselves, both outwardly and inwardly. Let them gather in one room and put a lamp in the center lit with olive oil, which represents the light that

is in all of you on that night. Then the initiate who is with you recites the Chapter of Light for you.[616] Listen carefully and pay close attention to what he tells you and at the conclusion of his recitation, let him approach the lamp with humility and submissiveness and call out ‘wretchedness upon whoever disbelieves in you, O ʿAlī.’ Then he extinguishes it, not by blowing upon it from his mouth. Then he shall say to you, ‘today the good things are made lawful to you.’ Whoever sows a seed on that night, in any land he desires, his seed is proper, the outcome is proper, and proper descendants will come from him. You shall stay that entire night together in peace until daybreak.’

[53] Indeed it is a night of pleasant things and a night of thing that draw one close (to God). O the success of the man whose seed takes root on that night! O the happiness of the woman who pleases the cultivator of her land on that night! “Your women are your tillage” (Q2: 223). Every Nuṣayrī woman is your tillage. A Nuṣayrī may approach his tillage at any time he pleases and anywhere he wants. Any woman who refuses a man who wants to sow his seeds in tillage in order to benefit it and produce a proper offspring, has disbelieved in the deity, rejected the proper teaching, and denied the mystery of *ʿayn – mīm – sīn.* They resemble the unbelieving women.

The Chapter on Women

[58] The Chapter on Women:

A. Q. M. (*alif qaf mīm*). These are verses for the auditors. Let there not be distress in your heart and don’t be disturbed. Your wives are tillage for all of you, so go unto them with

[616] This is different than the *sūrat al-nūr* of the Quran and is a prayer in which ʿAlī is celebrated as light. It can be found in MS Taymūr, *ʿAqāʾid* 564: 65-7.

impunity. The pleasant things that you can have sexual intercourse with are not forbidden to you. The women of the believers (lit. those who know) are not forbidden to you, so have sexual intercourse with those that please you. There is no sin upon you (if you sleep with) your sisters, mothers, paternal aunts, maternal aunts, fraternal nieces, [59] and sororal nieces. If a believing woman withholds herself from a believer, then she has shame in this world and her Lord will punish her with the most evil of the degrading reincarnations. He will afflict her with the greatest misfortunes and will give her to drink of the poisons of hell. He will lodge her in the vilest animal and cycles of years will elapse while she is in eduring punishment. As for those who violate this religious obligation and neglect to adhere to the great duty, I am stingy with him and withhold my mercy from him. I will feed him my punishment and clothe him in the vilest of incarnations. I will take from him the covenant and protection that I bestowed upon him. But if a woman offers herself to her coreligionists and pleasures her brothers and comforts her men, she will have happiness and be victorious in her indemnity; her desires will be granted, and her past and future sins will be forgiven.

O you believing, righteous, and devout women, guard the children in your bellies, nurse them and be good to them while they are children in your arms. Raise them to worship and love me. Teach them my name and agnomen. Accustom them from their youth to preserve the secret of my *shīʿa* and those who worship me, so they may [in turn] plead on your behalf, benefit you, and save you.

[60] Victorious is a woman who believes in the highest *ism*, the highest ʿAlī, the *ismī* lion. "There is no compulsion in religion." (Q2: 256) "You are all free of reproach from the day." (paraphrase of Q12: 92) Since you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers, after your birth, on your dying day, and after your resurrection, we have advised you in the loins of your father

and the bellies of your mothers to be good to your women and to give them your beneficence, and do not be completely hostile to them.

Your women are an adornment for you and they are a bed for you, so do not speak rudely to them if they obey you. Do not marry them to someone outside of your religious community (*milla*) and do not hand them over to someone who is living far away from your homes. Put them in charge of your seedlings. Instruct them to perfume themselves for you, to bathe in your homes, and not to deny your desires. Give them their clothes and their food and what they desire of their adornments. Do not approach women during their labor pains, for this harms all of you.

O believing, righteous, pure, good woman, do not refuse one who seeks to cultivate and plant fruit among the believers, without exception. Do not say that this is forbidden and this is allowed. He has declared it lawful for your [61] father, your brother, your son, your paternal uncle, your maternal uncle, the son of your maternal aunt and uncle, the son of your paternal aunt and uncle, your neighbor, and coreligionist to have sexual intercourse with you. Do not refuse any one of them and do not inconvenience a desirer among the believers, the Unitarians, who acknowledge ʿAlī the Secure.

Gaze at the moon and its light, how beautiful it is and how sweet! What made it beautiful and sweet? Your Lord ʿAlī in His loftiness lit it from His brilliance. His Christian ʿĪsāwī form entrusted it with happiness. And He looks at you from it and dispatches His will to you and supplies you with what you desire and what you hope for.

Gaze at the sun, how beautiful it is! And at its light, how powerful! And at its form, how lovely! And at its rays from their spread, how they keep the earth alive through it. He makes daytime joyous, hearts happy, and souls cheerful. He lit its radiance with what He deposited in it of its sweetness and the goodness of its clarity. He illuminated it with His ʿAlawite face when the

Ḥaydarī (lion) form sat in the center of the high sun and looked at the believing men and believing women, righteous men and righteous women, men who observe His religion, and women who observe. Obey your Lord, your creator, your husband, and the one who seeks from you. Bestow favors upon Him and praise Him.

[62] We have dispatched prophets to you and sent you sages and created wise men among you, so do not say, 'we are ignorant of an ordinance of our religion.' Ask them, seek their council, and satisfy them. Carry out their rulings and remunerate their responses. Listen to them and obey them. You will obtain felicity and will not be denied on the Day of Judgment. For you are the first of the delegates and the best of the creations.

O women, I have made men rulers over you, so try to please them and serve them. Raise your sons, teach your daughters, purify your bodies, clean your clothes, maintain your homes, memorize the sayings of your sages (*ʿuqqāl*), and respect your family. Avoid deceit, avoid theft, avoid rebellion, lest you be abandoned to the Opponent and *maskh, naskh,* and *faskh* (forms of reincarnations). You will be monkeys, return as pigs, be reincarnated as donkeys, and will become scorpions and snakes. I swear by my soul and essence that if you disobey my command regarding your secret and your announcement, I will take vengeance on you and make you hideous and despicable forms. Beware of disclosing your secrets and the secrets of the sons of our sect, for "you are deficient in intellect and religious capacity."[617]

[63] Let not a stranger deceive you and [make you] reveal to him that which you conceal and are commanded to observe. For "this is the evident loss!" (Q21: 11; 39: 15.) If a woman divulges her secret to someone outside her religious community, woe to her! She will have suffering in this world and severe punishment [in the next] from which she will find no refuge.

[617] This is a *ḥadīth.* See al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīh*, I, book 6, #301.

Repentance will be of no avail and grief will not appease my great anger that I pour on her as a deluge and my far-reaching treachery with which I harm her as punishment and revenge.

O righteous believing woman, be satisfied with the portion and luck that was allotted to you, and the life of this world that was destined for you. Do not torment your husband with your requests, "for the wealthy according to his means and the impoverished according to his means." (Misquotation of Q2: 236) "God does not burden a person except with what it is able to bear." (Q2: 286)

O believer, if you marry a woman hand over her bride price with a good heart and do not covet what you have given her. Provide for her as you provide for yourself. The avaricious, tight-fisted, and those who discomfort their wives, for them is shame in this world and shame and in the next world. Grievous torment will pursue him in the fires of hell. For once its fire is lit, it does not abate, does not subside, does not simmer, and does not boil over.

[64] Indeed we have kept from you that with which we burdened all of humanity. We did not trouble you with law and hardship. So be happy with what we have given you and thankful for what we have graciously bestowed upon you. For you are a tribe of guiltless men and glorified pietists. There is no blame upon you so worship me, please me, and remember me. I have unburdened you of that with which I have burdened others so please me with what I made you custodians over, and placed in your hands as slave and captive. As I had mercy on you, be merciful. As I have forgiven you, forgive. Women are frail so protect them. They are impoverished so provide for them. They are delicate so embolden them. They are ignorant so teach them. With you is security, so protect them and do not mislead them or harm them. [This is] advice from me to you, so do not forget it and do not act in opposition to it. Do not say that Satan made us forget, for this will be perdition for you.

If a woman offers herself to you do not shame her, do not become angry with her, and do not turn her away. Say something kind to her and accept her graciously. Treat her gently for she is frail. Do not shatter her or dash her hopes. This is my injunction that I have enjoined upon your fathers and grandfathers from when I first created you so don’t increase [65] my anger with you. For perhaps I shall shorten your time in your human form and be pleased with you and remove the evil of transmigration from your progeny and descendants so that you will return in peace to peace in my generosity, protection, and felicity. I am ʿAlī in the beginnings and ʿAlī in the ends and no one denies me except for the misguided.

Transcription of the Arabic Text

١٧

وقد جعلوا لنا قوانينا وشرائعاً لنا امتحانا لطائفتنا وحباً

بعضنا بعض وحذروا علينا إن نعتبر عرض الحياة

الدنيا كما ليس هي بشىءٍ [...] على اخيه بها

فاذا ورد عليك اخيك النصيري اطعمه وإسقيه واكرمه

١٨

ولا تؤثر نفسك عنه بشىء واذا كان أحد المشايخ او النقباء

او النجباء فبادر إلى اداء الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب

واياك اياك ان تبخل عليه به فانك ان بخلت بذلك تكون

قصرا في الديانة وتكون كانك من الكفرة الخارجين عن طائفتنا

المقدسة فأعرض عليه امراتك او اختك او امك او ابنتك

يتمتع بها ما دام مقيم عندك فان عرض الحياة الدنيا هو

عند النصيرية مشترك بينهم

قال بعض مشايخنا السالفين إن الفرض اللازم والحق

الواجب لا يكون لارفا دينيا الا من الادنى إلى الاعلا

ولكن الذى عليه الاجماع عندنا انه واجب في عنق كل نصيرى

لأخيه النصيرى سوأ كان اعلا او ادنى منه - الا جماعة

العقال فانهم لا يصح لهم هذا الا مع امثالهم من العقال

فاذا اضاف احد الجهال احد العقال فهذا لا يجوز له ان

يعرض على الجاهل الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب ولكن بالعكس

وكذا اذا زار احد العقال واحد مثله كان ذلك حتم عليه

١٩

س.. ما معنى قوله تعالى ولا تقربوا الزنا انه كان

فاحشة واثما كبيراً

ج.. قال سيدنا في مظهره باسم موسى.. لا تشته

امرة قريبك.. فهذا الاشتهاء هو حسد وخبث

وعكر لا يجوز للنصيرى ان يفعله بغير علم قريبه النصيرى

واما على قبول الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب فليس

بزنى.. وان إمراة اوهبتك نفسها خالصة لوجه

الله ..

س.. أيعد جماع النصيرى بغير النصيرية زنى

ج.. حاشا وكلّا فان ما عدا النصيرية ليست هى الّا

عيدان من الحيوانات فلا يعد ذلك منه زنى محرم بل

يثاب عليه لانه اذا حبلها وولدت منه يكون قد

جاء بنفر نصيرى زائدٍ فان المولود منها لا بد وأن

يصير نصيريا اذا كبر – واما النصيرية اذا زنت بغير

نصيرى فذلك هو الزنى المحرم

[margin]

ولكن بعض مشايخنا

التقاة اعترضوا على هذا

[الذى –crossed out] ويروون احاديث [صحيحة]

الاسناد عنه استاذنا

ابن همدان الخصيبى–

ان النصيرية اذا زنت بغير

النصيرى وهى تبغى الولد

لا الشهوة فلا تكون زانية

كذلك اذا رأت فى تسليم

نفسها لغير النصيرى

مصلحة تعود على ابناء

الطائفة فلا تكون زانية بل

تثاب على ذلك فى ادوار

قمصانها[...]

قال شيخنا وسيدنا ابن همدان الخصيبى كما رواه عنه من

سمعه منه = اذا دخل عليك احد العقال .. فقل

السلام عليك يا سيدنا ومرشدنا وشيخنا وملاذنا وسندنا

وقدم له كل ما يمكنك من واجبات الاكرام ولا تقصر فى أى

شىء تقتدر عليه فان ذلك فرض عليك وقدم له الفرض

اللازم والحق الواجب .. وانت طيب رخى البال

وعلى العاقل ان يقبل ذلك منشرح الصدر ويدعو لاهل

البيت بخير والخير عليهم إنشاء الله

كان أحد الجهال من النصيرية له امراة جميلة جدا وكان يحبها

حبا كتيراً فزاره احد العقال فاكرمه كما يجب ولم يترك شىء

من اسباب الهناء الا فعله معه الا امراته فانه فعل فعل

الكفار ومنعها أن تؤدى الفرض اللازم والحق الواجب

فعجل سيدنا عليه بالنقمة فاصبح هو وزوجته خنزيرين ذكر

وانثى واشتراهما احد النصارى الكفار وتعذبا فى ذلك المسخ

سنين عدة واخيراً صارا حجرين فى عتبة باب أحد الاسلام

(مكرمة)

لم يحصل عليها الا النصيرى بسر اعتقاده بسر

ع م س. وعبادته على ابن ابى طالب –

وهو سر وبشرى تلقيه إلى اخواننا فى الدين من سائر

المؤمنين بعلى المكين–

اعلموا اخوانى ايدهم الحق إلى الحق باتباع الحق

إن الشرائع تكاليف وامتحانات القيت عباءً ثقيلا فى

عنق اصحاب النقصان البشرية لنقصانهم فى الخلقة

الانسانية وقوة سلطان الشهوات [البسرية– crossed out] الشيطانية

وجهلهم بحقيقة الذات اللاهوتية ونكرانهم الصورة

الالهية الظاهرة بالهيئة العلوية

اما نحن معاشر المؤمنين من النصيرية لاقرارنا بعلى بن

٥٠

ابى طالب الاله وسطر الاثنى عشر اماماً المرسلين للهداية

وهم المرتضى والمجتبى والشهيد والسجاد والباقر والصادق

والكاظم والرضا والتقى والنقى والزكى والحجة القائم

المنتظر فقد حللنا من قيد التكاليف واستراح لنا

على بن ابى طالب فامر رسوله ان يشرنا بذلك فخاطبنا

بقوله "الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّتْ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتْ" وقوله "

قل من حرم زينة الله" وقوله "ليس لك عليهم سلطان" فكل طيب هو لنا حلال

وكل زينة هى لنا حلال وليس للشرائع علينا سلطان

فنهن نصلى لا لأن ذلك تكليف علينا ولكنه تقرب منا

تطلبيه قلوبنا قربا إلى غايتنا وغرضنا ونتزوج لا بعقد

ومن اعتقد بان ما يجرى من صورة عقد النكاح عند

التزوج بان ذلك فرض واجب فقد كفر ولكنه متابعة

للشياطين الحاكمين الآن فى الارض فالوطئ من النصيرى

هو اجتهاد لبذر بذور الزرع فى أرض صالحة لتكثير ابناء

٥١

الطائفة فاى نصيرى اعجبته أرض واراد القاء بذر فيها طالباً

زرعاً صالحاً لا يصح منعه عن غرضه النافع ولذلك لم يحرّم

علينا كما على غيرنا نكاح الامهات والاخوات والبنات

وغيرهن ولكنا نمتنع اتباعاً لما [اصتلح] عليه الناس من

ابناء جيلنا ولهذا ولكى لا يرسخ فى الاذهان فى طويل

الايام ان هذا الامتناع فرض كلف به النصيرى وضع

لنا عقلاءنا ومشايخنا ليلة الاباحة العامّة وهى سر

جليل رضى الله عن واضعيه واثاب [من نبهنا] الى الخير

من اشياخنا ولم يتركوا لنا بابا للشك او النسيان -

قالوا لنا فيما رواه الثقات .. انكم معشر النصيرية اصبحتم
شرذمة قليلة فى وسط كفرة لئام فالتزمتم مجاراتهم على كفرهم
وبطلهم ومن ذلك انهم يحرمون الطيبات على انفسهم ويلزموكم
بها ظلماً وعدواناً ومنها تحريم نكاح الامهات والاخوات
والبنات والخالات والعمَّات وهذا مما لا يتفق مع السعة عليكم
فى الدين والدنيا فلم يمكنكم التظاهر بمخالفتهم ولكن رأفة بكم
٥٢
وحفظا لدينكم وسلامة معتقدكم قد وضعنا لكم ما يرحمكم
ويمنع عنكم كثافة ظلمات الكفر الا وهو ليلة الاباحة ليلة
العبادة العظمى وهى ليلة التذكار الصحيح فلتجتمع كل جماعة
من نساء ورجال من بيت واحدٍ او بيوت متعددة من اهل
واقارب ولتدعو أحد العقال وتطهروا وتطيبوا وتزينوا
ظاهراً وباطنا واجتمعوا فى قاعة واحدة وضعوا فى وسط
المحل سراج مضاء بزيت الزيتون فهو مثال للنور الذى
يحل عليكم أجمعين فى تلك الليلة وليتقدم الذى من العقال
ويقراء لكم صورة [sic] النور وتستمعوا واهتموا جدا بأمركم وعند
الانتهاء من تلاوتها فليتقرب من السراج بخشوع وخضوع
ولينادى تعس من كفر بك يا علىٌّ ثم يطفاءه لا بنفخه

عليه من فمه ثم يقول لكم "اليوم احلت لكم الطيبات"

فمن زرع زرعاً فى تلك الليلة فى اى ارض أراد كان زرعه صالحا

ونتاجه صالحاً وجاء منه خلف صالح رضى طيب وامضوا

تلك الليلة جميعها بسلام حتى مطلع الفجر " " "

٥٣

فانها ليلة الطيبات وليلة القربات ويا فوز من صلح زرعه

تلك الليلة ويا هناء من أرضت زارع أرضها من النساء

تلك الليلة "نساؤكم هرث لكم" فكل امراة نصيرية هى

هرث لكم نصيرى يأتى هرثه وقتما يشاء واينما يريد

فاى امراة امتنعت عن رجل يريد بذر زرعه فى هرث ليصلحه

ويخرج منه إنسان صالح فقد كفرت بالاهوت وجحدت

التعاليم الصالحة وانكرت سر ع م س. وتشبهت بالنساء

الكافرات –

٥٨

سُورةُ النِّسَاءِ

ا ق م ذلك ايات للسامعين " لا يكن فى قلبكم حرج

ولا تزعجون نساءكم حرث لكم اجمعين فأتوهم امنين

ما حرمت عليكم طيبات ما تنكحون ولا حظرت عليكم نساء

العالمين فانكحوا ما طاب لكم منهن أيها المؤمنين لا جناح

عليكم فى اخواتكم وامهاتكم وعماتكم وخالاتكم وبنات الاخ

وبنات الأخت وان امراة مؤمنة منعت مؤمنا نفسها لها

فى الدنيا خزى وجزاها ربها اشر المسوخات وابتلاها

بعظيم الويلات وسقاها من سموم الجحيم واسكن نفسها

اشر البهيم ومرت عليها ادوار السنين وهى فى العذاب

المقيم وأما من عبت بهاذا الذين واهمل لازم الفرض العظيم

فانا عنه ضنين والعبده عنه رحمنى وازقه عذابى وأقمصه

شر قمصان واخذ منه ما وعدته من عهد وأمان وان

امراة وهبت نفسها لاهل دينها ومتعت اخوانها وواست

رجالها كان الهناء وفازت بأمانيها واُوتيت رغباتها

وغفر لها ما تقدم وما تأخر من ذنوبها

يا ايها المؤمنات الصالحات القانتات حافظوا على ما فى بطونكم

من الاولاد وأرضعوهم واحسنوا اليهم وهم اطفال فى

احضانكم وربوهم على عبادتى ومحبتى وعلموهم اسمى وكنيتى

وعودوهم من صغرهم حفظ اسرار شيعتى واهل عبادتى

عساهم يشفعوا لكم وينفعونكم وينقذونكم

٦٠

فازت إمراة آمنت بالاسم الاعلى على الاعلى حيدرة الاسمى

لا اكراه فى الدين ولا تثريب عليكم اجمعين من يوم ان كنتم

اجنة فى بطون امهاتكم وبعد ميلادكم ويوم موتكم وبعد

حشركم أوصيناكم فى اصلاب اباكم وبطون امهاتكم

ان تحسنوا إلى نساءكم وتاتوهم احسانكم ولا تميلوا عليهن

كل الميل

النساء زينة لكم وهن فراش لكم فلا تغلظوا لهن القول

ان هن اطعنكم ولا تزوجوهن فى غير ملتكم ولا تسلموهن

إلى غريب عن دياركم واحكموا فيهن غرسكم وامروهن ان

يتطيبن لكم ويتطهرن فى بيوتكم ولا يمنعكم اغراضكم –

وآتوهن كسوتهن وطعامهن واغراضهن من زينتهن

لا تقربوا النساء من مخاضهن فان ذلك اذى عليكم اجمعين

ايتها المرأة المؤمنة الصالحة الطاهرة الطيبة لا تمنعى

طالب زرع وغرس ثمر من المؤمنين قاطبة ولا تقولى

بلسانك هذا حرام وهذا حلال احل وطئك

٦١

لابيك واخيك وابنك وعمك وخالك وابن خالتك وخالك وابن

عمتك وعمك وجارك وابن دينك فلا تحرمى أحد منهن ولا

تزعجى راغب من المؤمنين الموحدين المقرين بعلى الامين

انظرى إلى القمر وضياه ما اجمله واحلاه ما الذى جمله وحلّاه

ربك على فى علاه اضاء عليه من سناه واودعته صورته

المسيحية العيسوية الهنية فهو ينظر اليك منها ويبعث

عليك رضاه ويمتعك بما تشتهين وما انت تأملين

انظرى إلى الشمس ما أجملها وإلى نورها ما اعظمها وإلى

هيئتها ما احسنها وإلى اشعتها من نشرها واحيا الارض

بها وجعل النهار مفرحا والقلوب منشرحة والنفوس

منبسطة اضاء سناها بما أودعه فيها من حلاها وطيب

جلاها انارها بوجهه العلوى اذ تربعت الصورة الحيدرية

فى وسط الشمس العلية ونظرت إلى المؤمنين والمؤمنات

الصالحين والصالحات العاملين بدينه والعاملات

اطيعى ربك وخالقك وزوجك وطالبك وأمنحيه وأحمديه

بعثنا لكم انبياء ارسلنا لكم عقلاء اوجدنا فيكم حكماء فلا

تقولوا جهلنا آمر ديننا فاسألوهم واستشيروهم وارضوهم

وحقوقهم أدوهم وواجباتهم أمنحوهم واسمعوا لهم واطيعوهم

تفوزوا بالنعيم ولا تحرموا يوم الدين فانتم أول المبعوثين

واحسن الخلق أجمعين

ايها النساء سلطت عليكم الرجال فراضوهم واخدموهم

واولادكم ربوهم وبناتكم علموهم واجسادكم طهروها

ولباسكم نظفوها وبيوتكم احفظوها واقوال عقالكم

أوعوها وآلكم راعوها واياكن والكذب واياكن والسرقة

واياكن والعصيان فانكن تتركن للضد والمسخ والنسخ

والفسخ قردة تكن خنازير ترجعن احمار تمسخن عقارب

وحيات تجعلن اقسمت بنفسى وبذاتى لان خالفتن

آمرى فى سركن واعلانكن لانتقمن منكن ولاجعلنكن

مثلات قبيحات رذيلات احذرن افشاء اسراركن

واسرار ابناء طائفتكن انكن ناقصات عقلا ودينا

فلا يغرنكن غريب عنكن فتبدون له ما انتن كاتميه ومامورات

بحفظه ان هذا لهو الخسران المبين . وان امرأة افشت

بسرها إلى غير ملتها فالويل لها عذابا فى الدنيا وعقابا

شديدا لا تجد لها عنه محيصاً والندامة لا تنفع والحسرة

لا تشفع غضبى الشديد اصبه عليها صبا ومكرى

البعيد آزيها به عقابا وانتقاما

ايها المؤمنة الصالحة ارضى بما اوتيت من قسمة وحظ

وما قدر لك من عيش الدنيا ولا تحرجى زوجك بطلبك

فعلى الموسر قدره وعلى المعسر قرره لا يكلف اليه نفسا

الا وسعها

ايها المؤمن اذا نكحت امراة فاتها اجرها بنفس طيبة ولا

تطمع فيما آتيتها وانفق عليها كما تنفق على نفسك

ان البخلاء والمقترين والذين يتعبون زوجاتهم لهم فى الدنيا

خزى وفى الاخرة خزى يعقبه عذاب أليم فى نار جهنم

ان نارها موقدة لا تهمد ولا تخمد ولا تفور ولا تدور

٦٤

انا منع[ن]اكم ما حملناه الناس أجمعين فلم نكلفكم شرعا ولا كلفة

فافرحوا بما آتيناكم واشكروا ما مننا عليكم به انكم قوم

مبرأون وبررة معظمون لا تثريب عليكم فاعبدونى وراعونى

واحفظونى حططت عنكم ما حملنه غيركم فراعونى فى

الذى جعلتكم عليه امناء وجعلته فى يدكم رق واسير

فكما انا[رحمتكم-crossed out] رحمتكم فارحموا وكما غفرت لكم فاغفروا

النساء ضعيفات فاحرسوهن وهن فقيرات فاغنوهن

وهن رقيقات فشجعوهن وجاهلات فعلموهن وعندكم

آمانة فاحفظوهن ولا توضلوهن ولا تأذوهن وصية منى

اليكم فلا تنسوها ولا تخالفوها ولا تقولوا انسانا الشيطان

فان ذلك عليكم خسران "

وان امراة أوهبتك نفسها فلا تخزها ولا تغضبها ولا

تنفرها وقل لها قولا معروفا وخذها بالعفو واحلم عليها

انها ضعيفة فلا تكسرها ولا تخبب رجاها - وصية

منى اوصيت بها اباءكم واجدادكم فى أول خلقتكم فلا تزيدوا

عليكم غضبى عسى أن اقصر مدتكم فى بشريتكم وارضى

عنكم وابعد شر التقمص عن اخلافكم وذريتكم وتعودون

بسلام إلى السلام فى جوادى وجنّتى ونعيمى وانا علىٌّ فى

الاولين وعلىٌّ فى الآخرين ولم ينكرنى الا الضالين

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